

Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 62 No. 2 2018

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CHS Convention

July 18-21 in Baraboo, Wisconsin

See the insert with this issue of Bandwagon for details and the registration form.

Big Top Circus Parade - Saturday, July 21



Above, this year marks Circus World Museum's 60th season.

Bill Johnsen photo

Left, the Friday night banquet and the presentation of papers will be at the Al. Ringling mansion.

Hunter Howell photo



Special convention presentations will be made at the recently restored Al. Ringling Theatre.

photo from Al. Ringling Theatre

Circus Historical Society

circushistory.org

Mission Statement

"To preserve, promote, and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."

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2018 Volume 62, Number 2

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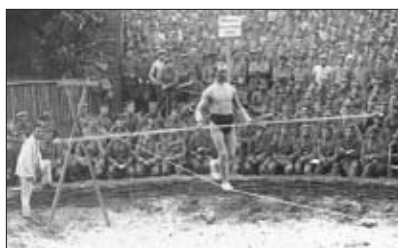
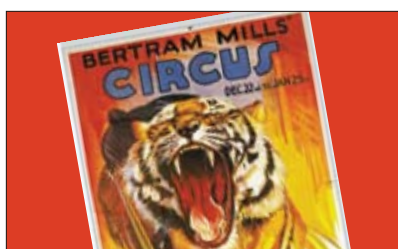


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From the Editor

The international world of the circus has been a cultural exchange like no other. Long before foreign exchange students, immigrating scientists, and border-crossing professional athletes, the circus was sharing with its global audiences the amazing performing talents and jaw-dropping attractions of foreign lands. Even before the modern Olympic games were established, the circus was already helping to create an appreciation for the people and cultures of other nations.

This tradition has been particularly vibrant among circuses of Europe and North America. A host of great American riders including Ben Stickney, Levi J. North and James Robinson roused audiences throughout Europe in the mid-19th century. Richard Sands visited England in the 1840s, introducing all-canvas tents to the Old World. Isaac A. Van Amburgh presented his wild animal menagerie in England from 1838 to 1845, and P. T. Barnum took diminutive American Tom Thumb on tours of England capitalizing on the public's interest in "human oddities."

Seth B. Howes introduced his Great European Circus to Americans in 1864, heavily promoting equestrians and clowns from England, France and Germany. In 1880, England's Rosa Richter, better known as Zazel, thrilled crowds in Barnum's big top when she was blasted from a massive cannon. Two years later, Jumbo departed London to make a lasting impact on the American consciousness.

In the Roaring '20s, Lillian Litzel (from Hungary) and Alfredo Codona (born in Mexico) were the greatest stars of the American circus, yet for several years each of these aerialists also received top billing on European shows during the

winter months. John Ringling North brought over Massimiliano Truzzi, Alfred Court, Unus, and Pinito del Oro, each of these remarkable artists attaining stardom in the United States before returning to their overseas homelands. Other 20th century European performers crossed the Atlantic and remained in the United States where they attained superstar status. Among them were the likes of Ella and Fred Bradna, the Wallendas, the Zacchinis, the Cristianis, and Gunther Gebel-Williams. Also, contemplate the cavalcade of European acrobatic troupes, aerialists, and animal trainers that Irvin Feld and Kenneth Feld contracted from Eastern and Western Europe.

Obviously, it is not possible to chronicle all of the interplaying stories of European and North American cir-

cuses, or the artists whose careers took them from one country to another, or the equipment and technology shared between the continents. However, the authors who have contributed to this European circus-themed issue convey important and illuminating elements of these subjects.

Dominique Jando traces the origin and development of Cirque Fernando in Paris, its acquisition by a Spanish clown, and its creative influence as Cirque Medrano. Gérard and Jeanne-Yvonne Borg shine a spotlight on the legend of the American frontier, "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and his two visits to France. Steve Richley shares a wonderful selection of Bertram Mills Circus posters that he has provided from his personal collection. Joel Parkinson has contributed an enlightening article that

recounts the wide-ranging circus skills that became evident during World War I among those serving on the Eastern and Western fronts. He also tells the story of an unbelievable circus staged by the American Expeditionary Forces in occupied Germany in 1919. Vanessa Toulmin delivers an insightful overview of Blackpool Tower, the longest continually running circus venue in England. Last, but not least, Al Stencell has delivered a fascinating account of the Austrian National Circus during its last season traveling by rail.

It seems fitting that *Bandwagon* commemorates these trans-Atlantic connections during the worldwide celebration of the 250th anniversary of the circus that Phillip Astley created – and the 225th anniversary of that same enterprise being introduced to North America. While over time the art form has been ever evolving, there is no end in sight to the resolute appeal of its international nature.

GTP



The British coronation year of 1937 marked Alfred Court's first appearance at Blackpool Tower Circus and one of the last engagements anywhere for the internationally acclaimed Codonas.

Renoir on our cover

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) was among a handful of artists who frequented Cirque Fernando after the Paris structure opened in 1875. At the circus and its rehearsals, these artists sketched and painted performers and scenes that captured their imaginations. Renoir completed *Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando* in 1879. His celebrated painting depicts two young Franco-German entertainers as they acknowledge the applause and gather oranges tossed into the ring by members of the audience to show their extreme delight in the girls' performance.¹

The mademoiselle on the left was 17-year old Francesca Wartenburg. She is portrayed as starting to curtsy while her 14-year old sister, Angelina, clings demurely to an armful of oranges she has just "collared."² Tissue still wraps one orange thrown by an appreciative onlooker. Although Renoir may have started painting the background at the Parisian circus, he completed the acrobats in his Montmartre studio where the natural daylight was superior to the gas chandelier illumination in the building. In his studio, he modified the positioning of the girls' arms and feet, and represented them to be younger than they actually were.³ He also changed the color of the girl's satin costumes that were originally pink.⁴

Note the harmony and continuity established by Renoir's use of yellow hues and shades in the girls' hair ribbons, costume trim and laced boots. Observe the subtle difference between the sisters' skin coloration and their pinkish tights. The artist's "wonderful play of warms and cools" helped to convey what Renoir saw as the virtuous qualities of the two little circus girls.⁵

Renoir's composition presents the youthful acrobats as having the elegance of ballet dancers in terms of their poses and implied motions. Soon after the painting was completed the artist's brother wrote, "One could say that by a process of incomprehensible subtlety and instantaneity, he has captured the



Pierre-Auguste Renoir self portrait, 1876

actual movement of the two children. It's just the way they walked, bowed, smiled in the circus ring."⁶

The public first saw *Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando* at the Seventh Impressionist Exhibition in Paris in 1882. Potter Palmer of Chicago acquired the painting for 8,000 francs (roughly \$4,000) in 1892. The Palmer family gifted it to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1922. At the Art Institute and via exhibitions around the world, it became an internationally popular work of art. The Wartenburg girls, on the other hand, lived out their lives in relative obscurity.

Renoir once stated, "For me a picture...should be something likeable, joyous, and pretty – yes pretty."⁷ The artist clearly achieved his objective with this circus themed masterpiece.

The oil on canvas measures 131.2 x 99.2 cm (51½ x 39¼ in.). It is reproduced on *Bandwagon's* cover with permission from The Art Institute of Chicago and Art Resource, NY.

Vertès on the back

In keeping with this issue's European theme, our back cover features

the front of the 1955 Cirque Medrano program with its simple, yet striking watercolor by Marcel Vertès (1895-1961). Hence, we behold a creation of a prominent 20th century artist, who like Renoir, was associated with the Fernando/Medrano story.

Vertès was born in Hungary, but worked as an artist and costume designer in Paris for much of his career. He moved to New York just before the fall of the French capitol during World War II. In the United States, he won two Academy Awards for his work on the 1952 film *Moulin Rouge*. Following his composition for Medrano, Vertès was recruited by John Ringling North to design the 1956 costumes and productions for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The artist's depiction of a delicate equestrienne riding a black steed appeared on the cover of that year's Ringling program. That cover was reproduced on *Bandwagon's* cover in 2015 (Vol. 59 No. 1), accompanied by Jennifer Lemmer Posey's insightful column "The Circus Designs of Marcel Vertès."

GTP

Endnotes

1. Edmond de Goncourt described this ritual in his 1879 novel *Les freres Zemganno* in which a child gymnast received a similar ovation when oranges were thrown at the end of his routine.
2. In a 1938 letter to her niece (Marguerite Streckfus) in which she enclosed a picture of Renoir's painting, Angelina Wartenburg wrote, "I am the greedy one, and collar most of the oranges..." The current location of this letter is unknown.
3. John B. Collins, "Cat. 9 Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando (Francisca and Angeline Wartenburg), 1879," *Renoir Paintings and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2014).
4. L. de Beaumarchez, "5e exposition de la 'Vie moderne.' P.-A. Renoir," *La presse*, June 23, 1879, p. 2.
5. Walter Pach, *Renoir* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), p. 62.
6. Edmond Renoir, "Cinquieme exposition de La vie moderne, P.-A. Renoir," *La vie moderne*, 1, 11, June 19, 1879, p. 175.
7. Art Institute of Chicago Museum Education Department, "Examination: Renoir's Portrayal of Contemporary Life and Childhood," *Many Faces: Modern Portraits & Identities* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1997), p. 16-17.

From Fernando to Medrano:

a Parisian Circus Epic

by Dominique Jando



Paris sous la neige: la rue des Martyrs, oil on canvas by Hyppolite-Camille Delpy (1842-1920), showing the back of Cirque Fernando from Avenue Trudaine, at the intersection of rue des Martyrs and rue Lallier (at right), as well as some of the surrounding neighborhood in 1876.

private collection

Paris's legendary Cirque Medrano holds a singular place in the Parisian cultural fabric and in circus history. From its beginnings as Cirque Fernando in 1873, until the end of Jérôme Medrano's management in 1962, it was tightly woven in the artistic life of the French capital, not only as a popular place of entertainment, but also for its long association with artists, writers, journalists, and Paris's literati in general. It has been celebrated in paintings, novels, movies, and even popular songs. Its history is also closely intertwined with the lives of its three historic directors: Louis Fernando, Geronimo Medrano and Jérôme Medrano.

Sometimes referred to as "The Temple of Clowns," it has featured many of the world's greatest clowns, from Geronimo Medrano to Buster Keaton, and it was where the extraordinary career of the Fratellinis was launched. It also sent into the limelight hitherto little-known performers of immense talent, transforming them into genuine circus stars. Its last performance under Jérôme Medrano's reign in January 1963 was an event attended by the Tout-Paris of the arts, and its demolition in December 1973 caused a massive uproar that

eventually led to legislation protecting Paris's historic theaters. This most Parisian of circuses was actually created by a Belgian circus entrepreneur. Ferdinand Constantin Beert (1835-1902) was born July 31, 1835 in Courtrai, Belgium, to Auguste Jean Beert, a butcher, and Delphine Beert, née Steinbrouk. At age eleven Ferdinand "ran away and joined the circus," in this case the Cirque Paise & Gauthier, which was touring in Belgium. There, Ferdinand trained with an acrobat and worked as a groom, learning the basics of horsemanship on the job. How Beert's career actually evolved after his auspicious flight from home remains conjectural.

On April 17, 1857, Ferdinand Beert married in Bruges Maria-Tereza Deseck, a Belgian equestrienne who, like him, was not born in the circus: her father was a bargeman. Ferdinand was 22, and Maria-Tereza already had a son, Louis-Charles, born in Bruges in 1851 (possibly out of wedlock), whom Ferdinand adopted. Louis-Charles (the future Louis Fernando) was then six years old, just 15 years younger than his new stepfather. The Beerts toured with the Cirque Gauthier in Belgium, Holland, Germany and England.



Roger Guit (1899-1978), a well-known Parisian artist who lived in Montmartre, created this artwork for the Cirque Medrano program covers in 1950. Dominique Jando Collection

In 1861, Ferdinand Beert was hired by Louis Dejean, the famous French circus entrepreneur, to work for his Parisian resident company. Beert performed for the first time in the French capital at Dejean's Cirque Napoléon (today's Cirque d'Hiver), and then, for the summer season, at his Cirque de l'Impératrice on the Champs-Élysées. For his first appearance with Dejean, Ferdinand presented an acrobatic duet on horseback with his partner, Armand, and performed a barrel-vaulting act. Ferdinand Beert, who was a very versatile performer, remained with Dejean for ten years, appearing in a wide variety of acts, on horseback and on the ground, as well as in clown entrées and in pantomimes.

In time, Louis Beert would perform the same equestrian repertoire as his father, but after a bad fall in 1865 in which he suffered a broken leg and a broken arm, Louis was forced to abandon bareback riding. The great equestrian master François Baucher (1796-1876), who was Dejean's equestrian director, decided to take Louis under his wing and teach him the intricacies of true horsemanship, from classic haute-école to presentation of horses "at liberty." Their sedentary years in Paris also gave Ferdinand and Maria-Tereza Beert the possibility to give Louis a solid academic education.

While working for Dejean, Ferdinand acquired a stage

name, "Fernando," and most importantly, a good knowledge of the Parisian audience. He also had ample opportunity to observe how Dejean managed his circuses. In the summer of 1871, Fernando appeared for the last time at the Cirque des Champs-Élysées, the Cirque de l'Impératrice's new name after the fall of Napoléon III's Second Empire in 1870. He did not return to the newly named Cirque National (formerly Cirque Napoléon) for the winter season. Contemplating the dawn of a new Republican era, Fernando Beert had decided to start his own circus.

The Cirque Fernando (1872-1897)

Beert's original Cirque Fernando, a traveling circus, was launched at Vierzon, a small town in France's Center region, in the spring of 1872. The company included ten horses and five artists: Fernando and his stepson, Louis, the equestrian Philippe Bertoletti, the trapeze artist and equestrian Baptiste Gillardoni, and the English clown George Howard. It was a small company, but the number of horses and the presence of four equestrians reveal that horsemanship was the performance's main fare, not surprisingly, since the age of the equestrian circus was still in full bloom.

Fernando's roster of performers grew in number as his circus toured the French provinces. As for Maria-Tereza, she retired from performing and began to take care of the administration. She was also busy bringing up the couple's three children, Adolphe, Marthe, and Eugénie, of whom only Adolphe and Marthe would perform in the family's circus.

La Fête de Montmartre

In August of 1873, Fernando set up his circus tent at the "Fête de Montmartre," a popular summer fair that had been traditionally held on the hill of Montmartre, on the northern edge of Paris. The previous month, however, the French government had given the green light to construct the Sacré-Cœur basilica on the open space where the fair traditionally took place, at the top of the hill. Consequently, the fair was moved down to the median walkway of the Boulevard de Rochechouart, on the southern edge of Montmartre. The area was large enough to accommodate the fair's booths, carousels, and even a traveling menagerie, but not a circus tent. Luckily, Fernando found an empty lot at the corner of the Boulevard de Rochechouart and the Rue Lallier, and was able to lease it for the duration.

Montmartre and its immediate vicinity formed an animated and colorful working-class neighborhood, already renowned for its many places of amusement. La Boule Noire, one of its better-known dancing halls, was located just across the boulevard from Fernando's lot. There were also the Bal Tabarin and La Reine Blanche, two of the most famous "bals" (dancing halls) that attracted revelers to the Boulevard de Rochechouart. The Moulin de la Galette, a "guinguette" (a tavern with dancing), was another popular rendezvous located on the hill. The Bal du Moulin Rouge, on the Boule-



Maurice Blum (1832-1909) painted *Artistes de Cirque* showing Geronimo Medrano rehearsing with his animals in the “construction” of Cirque Fernando in 1875.

private collection

vard de Clichy (the western continuation of the Boulevard de Rochechouart) would be later added to the list.

Montmartre’s large bohemian population included many painters, among whom were Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Georges Seurat, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. They quickly became regulars of the Cirque Fernando, where Mrs. Fernando gave them free access to rehearsals to sketch the performers at work and, sometimes, to see the show. In turn, they brought in their wake a host of young trendsetting writers, journalists and other Parisian literati. These well-connected visitors generated considerable publicity for the Fernandos.

When it was originally set up in Montmartre, Fernando’s circus was a small canvas tent supported by a single pole, which offered very basic seating accommodations. With its worn wooden wagons surrounding the tent, and most of its artists living onsite, the whole affair looked like a gypsy encampment. Yet, Fernando’s show was commendable and had charm, and it was generally well received by the critics.

More importantly, Fernando discovered that there was a large indigenous population ready to return to a local circus when its programs were renewed, and many additional visi-

tors came to have a good time in this lively neighborhood. Thus, when the fair came to an end, Fernando extended his lease and replaced his tent with a “semi-construction” – a canvas top over a wooden structure with a boarded wall to keep it warm during the coming winter months. The French novelist Jules Claretie (1840-1913) gave a good description of the Cirque Fernando at that time in his 1877 novel “Le Train 17,” in which his not-so-imaginary circus was named Cirque Francis Elton.

By the spring of 1874, Fernando’s company of performers had expanded with Ferdinand and Victor Bouthors; the equestriennes Clotilde Bertoletti, Mlle Marthe (Fernando) and Mlle Juliette; and most significantly, the clowns Geronimo Medrano (1849-1912) and his partner, Pasquale. Unbeknownst to him, Medrano was on his way to stardom in a building that would one day bear his name, for Mrs. Fernando, who saw the money flowing in at the box office, had decided it was time to build a permanent circus in Montmartre.

The Circus That Fernando Built

At the beginning of 1874, the Fernandos had met with a Mr. Loiseau, owner of the property where they were installed. They secured a 30-year lease on a parcel located a short distance west of their “construction,” at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs. Unlike the Rue Lallier, the Rue des Martyrs intersected the Boulevard de Rochechouart at a right angle, which made the design of a building easier. Furthermore, they could keep their existing circus structure active during the new construction work.

The Fernandos asked a local architect, Gustave-André Gridaine, to design the new circus after the Cirque des Champs-Élysées. The larger Cirque d’Hiver, with its remarkable self-standing cupola, was much too expensive of a model to be considered. Everything moved at a fast pace. On May 1, Fernando sent Gridaine’s completed blueprints to the Préfecture de Police to obtain the necessary permits. Although no building permit is known to have been officially issued, the construction work began on August 15, 1874.

To finance part of the operation, the Fernandos made an unusual deal with their building contractor, a Mr. Oudin. Oudin agreed to be paid in installments, and as a guarantee, the Fernandos transferred to him all their circus equipment, and even their lease. In turn, Oudin used Fernando’s properties and lease as collateral to obtain a credit of 100,000 francs from the Banque Bouley et Cie. In time, this financial arrangement would generate serious problems, and it would have unintended consequences that eventually resulted in Jérôme Medrano losing his circus to the Bouglione family nearly a century later.

By the end of November, the circus’s main infrastructure was completed. The new Cirque Fernando opened its doors seven months later, on June 25, 1875, at 63 Boulevard de Rochechouart. It had cost over 500,000 francs, approxi-

mately \$7.0 million today. In spite of a limited area (the usable site surface was about 130 feet x 130 feet) and a relatively small budget, Gridaine had done a very fine job. The style was “classic-Haussmann,” with a pleasant façade (albeit missing the equestrian statue that was meant to top it but never completed) ornamented with Corinthian columns framing three arched doors that led to a small reception hall, where the box office was located. Above the doors were the three French windows of the foyer standing above the reception hall, ornamented with elegantly designed wrought-iron balustrades.

The structure itself was a 16-sided polygon with an inside diameter of 34.10 meters (35 meters outside). The ring had the traditional diameter of 13 meters (slightly over 42 feet). The roof, with a metallic frame that remained fully visible, was divided in two concentric circles. The inner circle was an elevated cupola, 22.5 meters in diameter, supported by 16 cast-iron columns. Its height, up to the base of the lantern, was about 20 meters. The peripheral wall of the central cupola had windows, as did the lantern, so that sunlight could illuminate rehearsals and matinees. There were also 16 large gas chandeliers hanging between the columns at the circumference of the cupola to light evening performances.

The house could accommodate 2,080 spectators, packed on 13 rows of seats divided in three categories, with a partition between the second and third categories, and a “promenoir” (standing room gallery). The First and Second Places had padded benches with back support. The Third Places had simple benches with a “butt stop.” The seating accommodations were a little Spartan by today’s standards, but as a whole, the Cirque Fernando was more comfortable than Dejean’s much larger Cirque d’Hiver. The narrow peripheral “promenoir” ran just behind the Third Places. The bandstand was above the artists’ entrance, and facing it was a large “loge” (box) with four rows of seats.

Unlike the Cirque des Champs-Élysées and the Cirque d’Hiver, the various categories of seats were connected together, which generated a friendly class-mixing environment. The steep gradient between the rows not only offered



The Cirque Medrano, formerly the Cirque Fernando, soon after its acquisition by Geronimo Medrano in 1898.

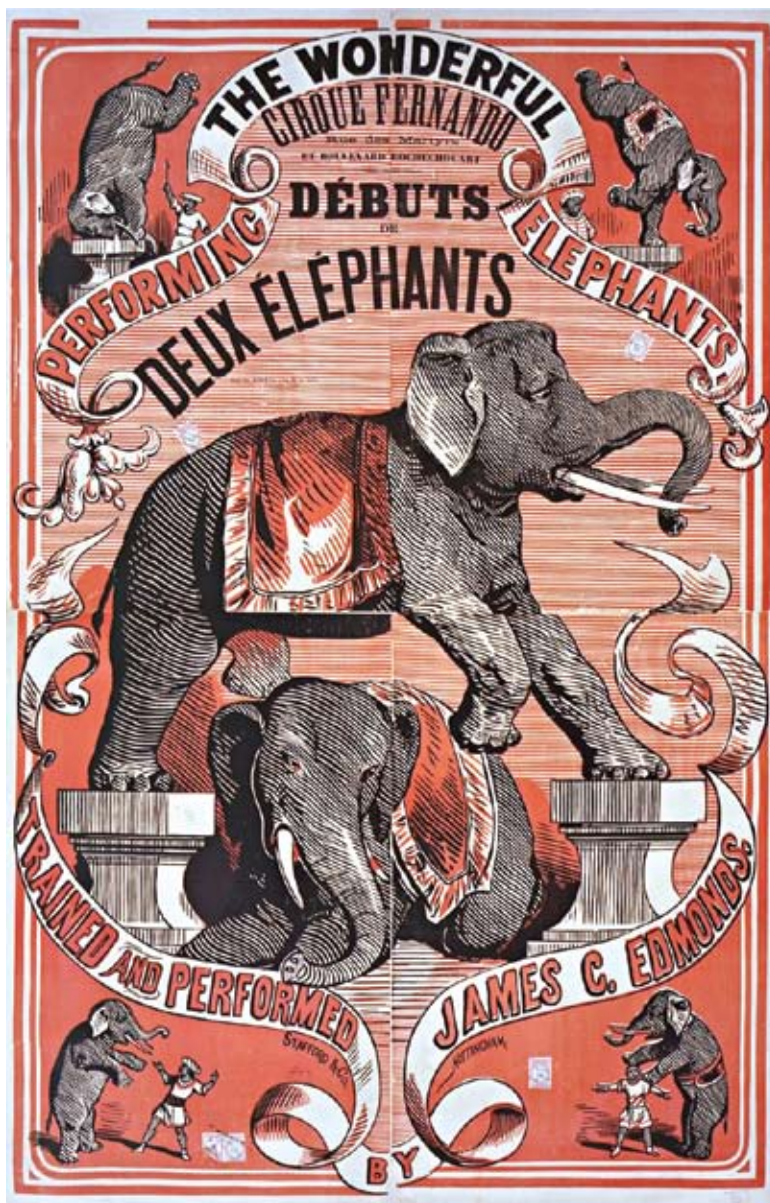
private collection

the audience an excellent visibility (notwithstanding the columns in front of the Second Places), but also very good acoustics, a definite plus for the clowns. The house was decorated with garlands of flowers painted on the periphery of the cupola, and gold accents adorning architectural details. The columns were painted in faux marble, and the walls and ceiling in a shade of peach-pink. The house design provided for a feeling of warmth and elegance, as well as intimacy.

Although the house was essentially circular, the entire building was contained within a square. On the front, flanking the façade on each side, were two spaces designed to accommodate a coffee house and offices. Starting in 1885, they were leased to the photographic studio Chamberlin, whose name would remain associated with the circus building until the late 1950s. In the back, behind the house, was a small two-story structure. On the street side, next to the stage door (at 72ter Rue des Martyrs), stood the concierge’s lodge and an all-purpose space that could house horses and animals. Fernando’s large apartment was located above, on the first floor in accordance with European floor numbering.

On the opposite side, stables (with room for 16 horses) occupied the ground level, and the floor above accommodated a suite of rather cramped dressing rooms for the artists. Two additional dressing rooms were located below ground level, under the seats, on each side of the ring entrance. This side of the building had no door opening to the outside, since the small Rue Viollet-le-Duc, which would later flank the east side of the circus beginning in 1880, did not yet exist.

The backstage area, between the two aisles, was relatively narrow. It served nonetheless as a secondary foyer with



James C. Edmond's two elephants were a novel attraction at Cirque Fernando in 1875.

Gallica/Bibliothèque Nationale de France

a small "buvette" (refreshment stand) that, when the main foyer at the front of the house was later suppressed under Jérôme Medrano's tenure, was replaced by a bona-fide bar where artists and spectators mingled during intermissions, a beloved feature that added to the charm and uniquely convivial atmosphere of this circus.

A Clown Earns Stardom

The Cirque Fernando had already begun to develop its Parisian reputation during its canvas days, but now that it was performing in a permanent building, with the added comfort this implied, it quickly became a true destination. Mrs. Fernando continued her policy of giving the neighboring artists free access to rehearsals, and they continued to bring along their friends including journalists and writers who liked the new circus's warm atmosphere. Fernando

Beert delivered the show quality that was expected, and the word of mouth and press reports were positive.

The program, which was renewed partially every week, was rich and varied. The opening performance included James C. Edmonds's elephants, a spectacular type of act as elephants were not common then. A few members of the vast and celebrated Chiarini family, the dog and monkey trainer Jules Bugny, the American equestrienne, Jenny Visser, and the clowns Vallier & William were part of the original fare, along with the dependable Gillardoni and Bertolotti, and the Vicomte de Corbie presided over a liberty act. Yet it soon became evident that Fernando's trump card was his "premier clown," Geronimo Medrano, better known as "Boum-Boum." He was by far the audience's favorite, and he was on his way to becoming Fernando's star performer.

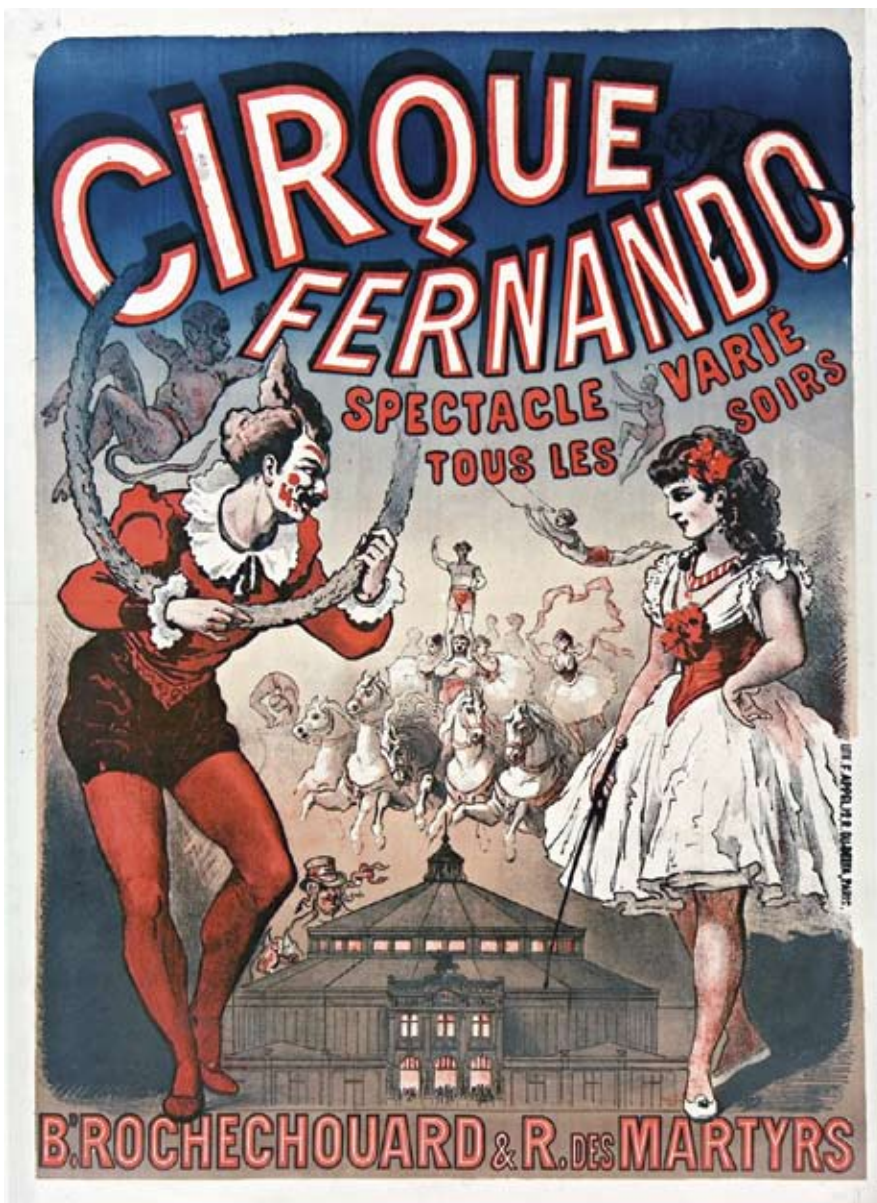
Born in Madrid in 1849 to a Spanish mother and a Mexican father, Geronimo trained in gymnastics as an adolescent, and, at age 20, built a flying trapeze act with a partner, Leopold Salonne. Created in 1859 at Paris's Cirque d'Hiver by Jules Léotard (1838-1870), the flying trapeze had quickly become a highly popular act due to Léotard's astonishing success. It was originally performed from trapeze to trapeze, but Medrano and Salonne were among the very first flying trapeze artists to include passes from a trapeze to a suspended catcher. Yet what truly set Medrano and Salonne apart is that theirs was a comedy act.

They had already performed all over Europe when they arrived in Paris in June 1872, at the Cirque des Champs-Élysées. In 1873, Medrano and Salonne parted company, and Fernando Beert offered Medrano work as a clown. Geronimo was blessed with a warm and sunny personality and was immediately successful. He was also good at training small animals, and his favorite partner in the ring was a pig, a foil of choice to many a clown.

Quite often, clowns in the ring use a catchphrase that eventually becomes their trademark. Medrano used to give the bandleader the signal to play his exit music by shouting to him a resounding "boum boum!" (boom boom). Geronimo's recurring exclamation stuck, and very soon audiences nicknamed him "Boum-Boum." Although he was not specifically featured in Fernando's advertising, a large part of the popular audience went to the Cirque Fernando to see Boum-Boum.

Enter Louis Fernando

During its first summer recess in August 1875, Cirque Fernando housed a series of concerts of "modern music." When it reopened in September, Fernando Beert's stepson, Louis Fernando, was in charge of the programs, becoming in effect the circus's artistic director. The Beerts were heavily in debt, and to add extra income, Fernando had decided to



Cirque Fernando poster from 1875 announcing "Spectacle varié tous les soirs" (Varied show every night).

Gallica/Bibliothèque Nationale de France

resume the tours of his traveling circus, while he progressively left Louis in charge of the building.

If Fernando knew how to run a traveling circus, the running of a Parisian circus was another matter altogether. It required being constantly aware of the performers' market, endlessly dealing with artists or agents, being attuned to the trends of the moment, and most importantly, being very creative. Louis Fernando, who was eager to be part of Parisian society, had a much better education than his stepfather and kept current with the fads of Paris life. Louis also had a more genial personality and was better suited than his stepfather to run a Parisian place of entertainment. In fact, Fernando Beert had rarely been in the limelight as a director. His wife and his stepson had always been the circus's front persons.

Louis proved to be a good artistic director. He knew how to compose appealing programs, was open to novelties,

and understood that he had to boost his best property, Boum-Boum Medrano. However, on the administrative side, the Beerts' weakness was their lack of financial acumen. By 1876, their financial and legal situation had become so complicated that it allowed Louis Fernando ample room to move as he saw fit. On the other hand, the Beerts had nothing left to their name. All their properties, including their building and their land lease, were held as a security by their bank.

In June 1876, Louis Fernando married into well-to-do Parisian bourgeoisie. The father of Jeanne Gabrielle Houssaye (1858-1894), his young wife, was a well-known tea merchant who had created the first Parisian tearoom on the Champs-Élysées, during the Exposition Universelle (world's fair) of 1867. Louis and Jeanne Fernando took up residence at the Rue du Dôme, near the Place de l'Étoile in Paris, in a fashionable neighborhood. Over the years, Louis's lifestyle, fueled by his social ambitions, would hurt his and his circus's already shaky financial situation.

Nonetheless, Louis Fernando was a capable artistic director. He was aware that his circus was not equipped to compete efficiently in the equestrian department with the Cirque d'Hiver and the Cirque des Champs-Élysées, or to stage the spectacular pantomimes the Cirque d'Hiver, and soon, the huge Hippodrome de l'Alma would produce. The Cirque Fernando was, however, better tailored than its competition for intimate comedy. In January 1876, Louis produced "Le Barbier Frétilant" (the wriggling barber), a comic pantomime with Boum-Boum in the title role. It was the first of a long series of similar pieces

that featured Geronimo Medrano and made him a true circus star.

Novelty acts, such as the riding seal of Raziscoff and the lions of Captain Cardona, were what set the Cirque Fernando apart from its competition. In December 1878, the sensation of the show was the aerialist Lala Kaira, "la Sirène des Tropiques" (the mermaid of the tropics), who had a considerable Parisian success and was immortalized by Edgar Degas. The Kaira Troupe, with Miss Lala, went on tour with the tenting Cirque Fernando during the summer and remained under contract with Fernando until the end of 1879.

Geronimo Medrano continued as Fernando's top attraction, and the central character of its joyous pantomimes. At the opening of the 1882 season, he was additionally promoted to the important function of Régisseur Général, a mixture of company manager and performance director. He was



Miss La La au Cirque Fernando (oil on canvas) was painted by Edgar Degas (1834-1917) in 1879. The subject was Lala Kaira, a mulatto aerialist who, at the time, was a sensation throughout Europe.

National Gallery, London

in charge of the performers, the crew, the rehearsals, and the performances. He also trained young equestriennes, such as the Cardinale Sisters, who performed at the circus as bare-back riders in 1885.

As for Jeanne Fernando, Louis's wife, she had made her debut in 1881 as an haute-école rider at the fashionable Cirque Molier, the "society circus" that Ernest Molier presented annually in his Parisian townhouse on the rue de Bénouville, the courtyard of which had been converted into a small private circus. She had been trained in horsemanship by her husband and had become a remarkable equestrienne. "Madame Louis Fernando" was subsequently an intermittent feature of her husband's circus.

Nouveau Cirque Competition

On February 12, 1886, Joseph Oller's brand-new Nouveau Cirque opened its doors on Rue Saint-Honoré, in the prosperous center of Paris. It was a revolutionary circus. Its ring could sink to reveal a basin that could be filled with water, the very first circus equipped with such a device. It also had a palatial and comfortable house that had been designed by Fernando's architect, Gustave Gridaine. However, the façade and the elaborate reception hall were the work of Charles Garnier (1825-1898), the celebrated architect of Paris's extravagant Opéra, which gave the place additional cachet.

Beside its plush elegance and chic surroundings, which would quickly make it the High Society's circus of choice, the Nouveau Cirque had put together a brilliant company of artists. Fernando now had serious competition, but his business remained good. Although George Footit, already a star clown at the Nouveau Cirque, loomed bigger than Medrano in the public eye, Boum-Boum was still attracting a faithful audience to the Boulevard de Rochechouart. Then, at the end of the summer of 1887, the touring Cirque Fernando ceased its operation. In 1888, Fernando's Parisian circus remained open during the summer three days per week; the rest of the time, Louis Fernando gave riding and vaulting lessons in the ring.

In January 1889, the Cirque Fernando offered "En Selle pour la Revue," a humorous revue of the previous year's events written for Boum-Boum Medrano at his request by two well-known librettists, Surtac and Alévy (Gabriel Astruc and Armand Lévy). Boum-Boum was the revue's traditional "compère" (a mixture of master of ceremonies and stand-up comedian), and Louis Fernando, playing himself, was his straight man. The revue was very successful and remained on the bill for three months, in spite of the controversial presence in

the cast of La Goulue (Louise Weber, the infamous cancan dancer immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec).

Yet, on the Boulevard de Rochechouart, all was not in the pink at the "pink circus," as the circus chronicler, Serge, would later dub it, referring to the building's warm color scheme. Louis Fernando's financial situation had become increasingly unmanageable. As much as he was attached to the circus that had made him famous, Medrano was, from his position as Régisseur Général, well aware of Fernando's troubles, and he could not see a bright future for himself in the company. In May, at the end of the season, Geronimo Medrano left the Cirque Fernando. In August, Boum-Boum debuted at the Nouveau Cirque.



Geronimo "Boum-Boum" Medrano, c. 1885. Medrano Archives

Fernando's Decline

With Medrano's defection, Fernando had indeed lost one of its main drawing cards. Although Boum-Boum Medrano did well as a clown at the Nouveau Cirque, he was outshined by George Footit, who had teamed up with the Black auguste Chocolat. Nevertheless, Medrano impressed Raoul Donval, the Nouveau Cirque's new director, who appreciated Geronimo's many talents. In 1892, Donval gave him the position of Régisseur Général, the same position he had held for Louis Fernando, but this time in a much healthier financial environment.

Louis Fernando, had a huge hit the same year with his political-military pantomime, "Les Marins de Cronstadt," but he flopped soon after with a comic pantomime. Nonetheless, Fernando's programs continued with their usual mix of novelty acts and comic pantomimes, which still competed effectively with the traditional equestrian fare of the Franc-nis' Parisian circuses that was slowly going out of favor.

The mighty Hippodrome de l'Alma, home of large equestrian spectacles, had to close its doors at the end of 1892,

and was demolished in 1894. That year, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin had formed the International Olympic Committee, and the Automobile Club de France was created the following year. Sports and gymnastics were in full bloom, and the automobile was beginning to replace the horse. In that context, Louis Fernando's circus formula was well attuned to the times. Yet, he still had to contend with the Nouveau Cirque and to deal with a chaotic financial situation that was rapidly catching up with him.

To make matters worse, Jeanne Fernando died on May 22, 1894, from tuberculosis. Jeanne was only 36, and Louis Fernando was devastated. He closed his circus and rented the building out for a season of operettas. The circus took the name of "Théâtre Parisien." It finally reopened as a bona fide circus in December with the Rancy-Loyal troupe in a show originally produced by Alphonse Rancy in his resident circus at Lyon. Louis Fernando was nowhere to be seen.

The Rancy-Loyal troupe occupied the Cirque Fernando, renewing its shows regularly, until the spring of 1895. Then the circus was again rented out for a summer season of variety and took the name of "Concert d'Été." At the end of the summer, it was completely refurbished, equipped with theater seating and a "coco mat" (a heavy mat made of coconut fibers) in the ring as in the Nouveau Cirque. It reopened in September 1895 under Louis Fernando's management. In spite of commendable programs that were renewed each Wednesday, Louis Fernando had a hard time bringing back his public.

The Banque Bouley et Cie, his bank, had long ago realized the security they had inherited from the Fernandos' original dealings. On October 25, 1897, the new owner of Fernando's circus building, who had not been paid by his tenant, announced that the entire property, land and walls, would be auctioned off. The press mentioned the upcoming sale in early November. What exactly happened after that is unknown, and the sale, if it took place, was not publicly reported. In any event, the circus was closed, and a sign was left on its door which read "For Rent."

Just before the announcement of his circus's sale, Louis Fernando had remarried on October 2, 1897 in the Paris suburb of Courbevoie. Thereafter, he disappeared from the public eye and from the circus scene, although he remained in Paris. He died soon after the turn of the 20th century and was buried at the Cimetière de Montmartre. His mother and stepfather had retired to Bruges, Belgium, where Fernando Beert passed away on December 30, 1902. The saga of the fabled Cirque Fernando appeared to have come to an end.

The Cirque Medrano (1897-1962)

Geronimo Medrano had followed the disturbing disintegration of the Cirque Fernando, and the announcement of its demise hit close to home. He had spent 15 years with Fernando, saw the construction of the circus building, and became famous in its ring. Aside from Louis Fernando, no

one had had more to do with its success than Medrano. For seven years, as its Régisseur Général, he had managed its daily operations. He knew this circus inside out. Geronimo had just managed Raoul Donval's short-lived Hippodrome du Champs de Mars. He was approaching his fifties, and he thought it was perhaps time to move on.

Boum-Boum Medrano, Circus Director

In December 1897, it was announced that Geronimo Medrano was the new tenant of the circus on the Boulevard de Rochechouart, and he had renamed it Cirque Medrano. Medrano, well aware that time was of the essence if he wanted to take hold of the vacant Cirque Fernando, had moved swiftly. In order to secure a long-term lease, he had enrolled his old friend Emilio Maîtrejean, a retired acrobat and daredevil who had put his savings at Geronimo's disposal.

Financially, the transaction was risky since Medrano did not have time to secure any other backing. However, two factors had swayed his decision. First, the Cirque des Champs-Élysées was moribund and the Cirque d'Hiver was declining, which limited serious competition to the Nouveau Cirque. More consequential, Chamberlin, the photo studio that occupied the spaces framing the circus's façade, was the tenant of the circus itself, not of the property's owner, and Medrano would therefore collect Chamberlin's rent, the amount of which was about 40,000 francs a year. Geronimo signed a deal with the proprietor without much vacillation and moved his quarters into the circus building's apartment.

The happy, genial, outgoing Boum-Boum Medrano had an excellent reputation among Parisian journalists and critics, and of course among the old Cirque Fernando's aficionados. The fact that the defunct Cirque Fernando was now Medrano's circus seemed to everybody a logical conclusion. And as everybody knew, a circus that bore the name Medrano would only be a joyous circus.

The Cirque Medrano opened its doors on December 22, 1897 to an enthusiastic audience. The General Manager was Emilio Maîtrejean, and the company for the season included the remarkable somersaulter on horseback, François Fratellini, his brothers, the clowns Luigi and Paolo, and "The Gentlemen," the eccentric acrobatic and musical act performed by Albert and François. Not yet the fabled clown trio, the Fratellini brothers had nonetheless sowed the seeds of a long association with the Cirque Medrano.

Geronimo Medrano was no longer performing as a clown. He was now a circus director, and only appeared occasionally holding the "chambrière" (the equestrian master's long whip). Like its predecessor, the Cirque Medrano gave priority to novelty acts and comedy, and it changed its program partially every week, with performances every night, and matinees on Thursdays, Saturdays, and holidays.

Geronimo Medrano maintained the old open-door policy that Mrs. Fernando had originated for the neighboring



Geronimo Medrano, c. 1905.

Medrano Archives

artists. The establishment of the legendary Bateau-Lavoir as an artists' communal house in Montmartre at the turn of the century would bring another generation of upcoming artists and painters to the Cirque Medrano: Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Kees van Dongen, Jean Cocteau, Guillaume Apollinaire, to name but a few. Like their predecessors, they helped keep in the limelight the already fabled "cirque montmartrois" (circus of Montmartre).

Unlike the ambitious and carefree Fernando, Medrano was fiscally conservative. He knew how to attract good acts at a reasonable price. He was well known and had a good reputation in the business, and his cheerful personality was hard to resist. The circus showed a positive balance at the end of 1898. After Fernando's never-ending financial quandaries, Medrano's landlord was finally able to put his mind at rest.

A new "Hippodrome" opened its doors in May 1900 on the Place de Clichy, not very far from Medrano. It was supposed to take advantage of Paris's Exposition Universelle of

1900, but the fair did not prove a boon for Parisian circuses. A huge arena designed for equestrian spectacles, the Hippodrome was perhaps too big to be profitable. It would eventually close in 1907. In 1906, another circus was built on Paris's Left Bank, Avenue de la Motte-Piquet. The cavernous Cirque Métropole (later Cirque de Paris) would remain active with various ups and downs until 1930. And there were still, of course, the Cirque d'Hiver and the Nouveau Cirque.

Paris had become Europe's circus capital. In spite of heavy competition, the Cirque Medrano held its own. Whereas all its competition would have dark interludes and turn into movie houses or theatres at times, Medrano never ceased being a circus. It had qualities that its rivals could not match: warmth and intimacy; a lack of pretension that reflected well the personality of its beloved founder; a great variety of offerings; clowns who were allowed to shine in an environment that perfectly suited them; and perhaps for all these reasons, it had fierce supporters. Soon, the circus on the Boulevard de Rochechouart became known simply as "Medrano."

Change of the Guard

In 1892, while he was still working at the Nouveau Cirque, Geronimo Medrano had married Charlotte Blanche Lippold. They formed a strong couple, even though Blanche was barren and could not give Geronimo an heir. On August 18, 1905, after 13 years of marriage, Blanche Medrano died. Geronimo was devastated. He was 56 years old, and he had no successor. Yet he had a solid support system in his close friends at the circus, the faithful Emilio Maîtrejean, Thomas Hassan, his Régisseur, and "Mr. Emile," his comptroller.

His circumstances brightened in early 1906, when Geronimo found a warm-hearted confidante in Berthe Perrin (1876-1920), a 30-year old seamstress who was 25 years his junior. Their friendship eventually developed romantically and, on May 18, 1907, Berthe gave birth to a son, Jérôme Medrano (1907-1998). The Medrano line was finally revived, and Geronimo was elated. He married Berthe on June 13. Berthe was a sweet, caring individual, but she was also a strong woman who knew how to take care of business. Although she was not a circus person, Berthe Medrano proved to be a good partner for Geronimo.

In 1908, Medrano hired a new clown duet, Antonet & Grock. Grock had replaced Antonet's previous partner, the immensely creative Little Walter, whose appearance Grock had copied to perform the musical entrée Walter had created with Antonet. Later, the piece, with some additions, would make Grock a star. The following year, Louis Fratellini died in Warsaw during a smallpox epidemic, and his brothers, François, Paul and Albert joined forces and formed a clown trio to help support Louis's widow and large brood. Grock and the Fratellinis would long be associated with Medrano.

The talented Spanish clowns, Rico and Alex Briatore, were featured on the Boulevard de Rochechouart from 1910



Spanish clowns Rico and Alex Briatore were featured at Cirque Medrano from 1910 to 1914. Alegria-Briatore Archives

to 1914. As Parisians' favorite clowns, Rico & Alex had successfully supplanted the Nouveau Cirque's Footitt & Chocolat. Medrano had become the Parisians' circus of choice. The Cirque d'Hiver had been converted into one of Paris's worst movie houses in 1907. As for Medrano, it dealt smartly with the emerging success of the cinematograph. From 1912 until the end of World War I, its programs ended with a short projection of the "American Vitograph" [sic] that morphed into the "Medranograph." Another acknowledgment of changing times, Geronimo installed electric lighting.

Although everything was looking good for his circus, it was not the same for Geronimo Medrano. In late 1910, he had a stroke that left him partially paralyzed. He bravely continued running his circus until April 27, 1912, when he died suddenly of an attack of uremia. He was 62, and his son, Jérôme, who had very little time to know his father, was only five years old. Geronimo had bequeathed Cirque Medrano to him.

Berthe Medrano's Circus

Geronimo "Boum-Boum" Medrano was buried near his first wife, Blanche, after whose death he had commissioned a mausoleum at the nearby Cimetière de Montmartre. As for Berthe Medrano, she was intent on preserving their son's inheritance. Without hesitation, she took over the management of the circus that bore her and her son's name. She left to her late husband's associates, Emilio Maîtrejean and Thomas Hassan, the care of running the circus's day-to-day operation, and asked a former acrobat whom she trusted, Rodolphe Bonten, to help her cast the shows. As for the circus's finances, she took full control. To make things clear, five-year-old Jérôme Medrano, dressed in the traditional blue uniform of the régisseurs, appeared at the ring entrance at some matinees.

Berthe Medrano proved a good administrator, and the team that surrounded her was indeed very competent. The political situation in Europe was tense. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany was posturing aggressively, and Parisians, who had not forgotten the war of 1870, were on edge. Yet Medrano was still doing well, in spite of the fact that Emilio Maîtrejean, who had been instrumental in its success and indeed its very existence, had decided to retire.

In the spring of 1914, Rodolphe Bonten hired the new

clown trio of François, Paul and Albert Fratellini, who had just been featured with Circo Parish in Madrid. They did not stay long. On June 28, a Yugoslav nationalist assassinated the crown prince of Austria-Hungary, the Archduke Franz Joseph. Austria issued an ultimatum to Serbia, which supported Yugoslavism (the movement for a South Slavic national identity). On July 28, the Austrian army invaded Serbia, which, owing to the intricate web of European alliances, triggered World War I. On August 3, Germany, Austria's main ally, declared war on France, and Paris's circuses and theatres closed their doors. The Fratellinis returned to Spain, along with Rico & Alex.

In December 1914, the Nouveau Cirque reopened. Most theatres, however, remained closed until the beginning of 1915. Then, little by little, they came back to life, including Medrano. Casting the shows had become difficult since a large number of male performers had been drafted. The situation also made it impossible to tap into the large reservoir of performers from countries that were at war with France.

The Fratellinis disliked William Parish, the owner of Madrid's Circo Parish, and they let Bonten know that they were available and ready to come back to Paris. They had a large family to support, and their nationality was difficult to sort out. Paul was born in Sicily, François in Paris, and Albert in Moscow. They were exempt from military service.

Bonten jumped on the opportunity.

The Fratellinis were not only extremely talented, they also offered something new, a clown trio. Until then, clowns had worked solo, or as a clown/auguste team, like Footit & Chocolat and many others after them. To the traditional duet of François (the clown, charmingly light and graceful) and Paul (a ridiculous and bombastic auguste), they had added Albert, who had developed an extravagant and phantasmagoric auguste character that injected a good dose of mirthful



A crowd in 1916 is waiting for the opening of Cirque Medrano's door on rue des Martyrs in order to access the popular "Secondes" seating. The next door to the right (open) is the stage door. The small building to the right of the stage door houses the stables, and above them are three windows and a center balcony open on the apartment of Geronimo (and later, Jérôme) Medrano.

Albert Moreau/ECPAD



Berthe Medrano with her son Jérôme and her husband, Rodolphe Bonten, c. 1918. The marriage was one of convenience intended to protect Jérôme's future inheritance.

Medrano Archives

surrealism in everything the brothers did. They also had a vast repertoire of classic entrées and musical interludes that, along with their imagination, added a veneer of novelty.

At a time when Parisians needed to escape the daily reality of a war with no end in sight, Medrano was the place to go. It always had good clowns to bring smiles to everyone's face, but the Fratellinis delivered even more, a total escape into a hilarious world of pure fantasy. They quickly became the talk of Paris, as journalists, artists, writers, and Paris literati in general transformed the trio into stars of first magnitude. In time, Fernand Léger (1881-1955) and a host of painters immortalized them, journalists chronicled their every move, writers wrote essays and books about them, their likeness was used in advertising, and after the war, their fame crossed the borders. Medrano collected the fruits of their glory.

The Bonten Era

When World War I ended on November 11, 1918, Medrano entered an era of great prosperity. The Cirque d'Hiver and the Cirque de Paris were inactive, and the Nouveau Cirque was desperately trying to survive. Medrano had become "Le cirque de Paris." Fernand Léger exhibited his neo-cubist painting *Le Cirque Medrano*, the first of a series of works on the circus. The Fratellinis were still Paris's "enfants chéris" (favorite children), and habitués returned every week to see what new entrée these very imaginative clowns offered.

Yet all was not well. Berthe Medrano was diagnosed with cancer. In January 1918, she had transferred the man-

agement of the circus to her faithful and capable right-hand man, Rodolphe Bonten, and went to rest in a villa she had bought in Nice, on the French Riviera. Jérôme was eleven, and she had to secure his education and his future. The circus was his, and Berthe wanted to make certain that it would remain so. Upon her return to the capital, she had a long discussion with Bonten. On June 20, 1918, Rodolphe Bonten and Berthe Medrano were married in the City-Hall of Paris. It was a marriage of convenience. Rodolphe, as Jérôme's stepfather, would become his legal guardian, and for the time being, with or without Berthe, the Cirque Medrano would remain a family affair.

Rodolphe Bonten was a capable director, and the circus continued to flourish under his reign. Berthe Medrano passed away on August 30, 1920, leaving to Bonten the responsibility of the circus and of her son. Berthe was buried near Geronimo at the Cimetière de Montmartre, and Bonten became de facto Jérôme's tutor. To his credit, he made sure that Jérôme received an excellent education in the best possible schools.

Bonten also took Jérôme on circus trips during school recesses. Although they both lived in the circus's apartment and Jérôme was thus immersed into circus life, Bonten did not try to involve him in any aspect of the circus's affairs. Like many kids orphaned in adolescence, Jérôme resented the stepfather that fate had imposed on him, and who apparently did not provide him with the kind of parental affection and interest he craved.

Yet, Bonten ensured that Jérôme's circus continued to thrive. There were now five active circuses in Paris. Although the Nouveau-Cirque and the Cirque de Paris did not present a big threat to Medrano, the Cirque d'Hiver and the Empire Music-Hall Cirque quickly became serious contenders. Medrano still had the Fratellinis, who were a big hit in 1923 with a comic pantomime, *Les tribulations d'un travailleur* (the trials of a workman), but not for long.

At the end of the 1924 season, the Fratellinis asked Bonten for a raise. Bonten refused to change their contract. Gaston Desprez jumped on the opportunity and offered them what they asked and more. He made them artistic directors of the Cirque d'Hiver, a purely honorary title, but which made for very good publicity. The Fratellinis were extremely popular, and Desprez had realized a major coup. Bonten saw the evidence of his mistake at the beginning of the 1924-1925 season when Medrano's box office receipts showed a significant decline.

Meanwhile, Jérôme Medrano was completing his mandatory military service at Saint-Cyr l'École, near Paris. The following year (1927) Grock was staring at the Empire (he had long left the circus ring for the much more lucrative va-

riety stage), while Medrano launched two new clown trios, the Dario-Barrios, who had adjoined to their group the remarkably talented auguste, Rhum, and Jean-Marie Cairolì, Porto and Charlie Cairolì. Medrano was still the ideal place to showcase talented clowns, and if it had lost the Fratellinis, the circus had a faithful audience that truly appreciated good clowning, which the Dario-Barrios and the Cairolis delivered.

On May 18, 1928, Jérôme Medrano reached his majority. He had previously claimed to wish to continue his studies and become a Merchant Navy officer, but suddenly everything changed. On June 4, to everyone's surprise (Jérôme himself admitted later that it was on a whim), he married the beautiful Rachel Baquet, whose father was the Cirque Palisse's general manager and owned a café near the circus. Mr. Baquet was also in charge of Medrano's bar and concessions.

Just ten days later, on June 14, 1928, Jérôme Medrano took official possession of his circus, and dismissed Rodolphe Bonten. Certainly a little shaken, Bonten disappeared from the circus scene. Immediately, Jérôme was fully in charge and Cirque Medrano was entering a new era. He made his new wife, Rachel, co-director and the press dubbed the young couple, "Europe's youngest circus directors."

Enter Jérôme Medrano

Along with Bertram Mills and his sons Cyril and Bernard in England, John Ringling North in the United States, and before them, Hans Stosch-Sarrasani in Germany, Jérôme Medrano belonged to a small group of circus directors who had received a solid academic education, and whose cultural interests and social connections expanded outside the circus world. They each showed a genuine enthusiasm for the circus that was triggered by a mixture of vested interest and artistic inclination. They would change the image of the circus in their respective countries and beyond.

Jérôme Medrano inherited a business in good shape, artistically successful and fiscally stable, conditions for which Berthe Medrano and Rodolphe Bonten can be commended. Although he had spent his childhood and most of his adolescence within the walls of his circus, Jérôme did not know much about its day-to-day management. Of course, he had known of the peculiar situation of its ownership.

Jérôme had a hard time coming to terms with Bonten's foolish dismissal of the Fratellinis, whom he had known since childhood, and he attributed this as one of the primary reasons for his stepfather's dismissal. Jérôme surrounded himself with a mixture of old Medrano collaborators, such as Thomas Hassan, the circus's Régisseur, and newcomers such as the well-known journalist and circus chronicler, André Legrand-Chabrier, who, as Secrétaire Général of the circus, took over press and public relations. The latter's appointment to a key position that was customary in Parisian theatres, but not in the circus, was the first sign of a new

managerial style.

Unlike most of his colleagues who relied heavily on agents to find new talent, Jérôme Medrano regularly visited Europe's and America's major circus and variety shows and did his own talent search. In January 1929, as the Medrano season ran steadily on its rails, Jérôme and Rachel went to Berlin to visit the famous Wintergarten, where some of the best circus and variety acts of the time could be seen. Then they made a stop in Gottingen to see the fabled Circus Sarasani and meet with its legendary director, Hans Stosch-Sarrasani. The giant German circus's innovative organization, its technical achievements, and its spectacular show duly impressed the Medranos.

After the end of the 1928-29 season in June, the circus building was entirely refurbished. Everything was painted anew, and Barbier-Daumont, a decorator well known in the theatre community, painted a series of frescoes on the periphery of the house depicting scenes of the life of traveling circus folks. Jérôme had four cabins installed on the lower roof of the building to house spotlights and their operators, and a fifth one was installed in the foyer, where the projector of the old Médranographe used to be. Elie Anatole Pavil (1873-1948) was commissioned to create two large paintings. The first of these, representing traveling entertainers parading on a fairground stage, welcomed the guests in the entrance lobby. The other one, picturing Paris's most famous circus and variety critics, was displayed behind the new bar installed backstage.

When the circus reopened on September 9, 1929, its program had been entirely conceived by Jérôme Medrano. It was a true Parisian event attended by the Tout-Paris—journalists and major critics, press and industry magnates, theater stars and producers, renowned novelists and authors, publicity-hungry politicians, and many others with a name. The show featured a bounty of remarkable acts, including a spectacular ten-person bar-to-bar flying act on two porticos placed in cross, created especially for Medrano by Edmond Rainat, and an 18-horse liberty act presented by Ernst Schumann. The clowns were Charley-William Ilès and Emile-Paul Loyal, and the trio Cairolì, Porto & Carletto (Charlie Cairolì), who had just signed a long-term contract.

At the end of the evening, in the ring, Thomas Hassan was made "Officier de l'Instruction Publique." It was indeed a night to remember. Jérôme's "New Medrano" was launched.

Medrano's Golden Age

Jérôme Medrano's revamped circus emerged as a contemporary place of entertainment, where a fast-paced show with top-shelf acts was presented in the best possible light. This can be taken literally since acts were often isolated in spotlights instead of being presented in full light, as had been the norm since the days of the gas chandeliers. There were some old-timers who complained that the circus had lost its original atmosphere, and the show looked like a "mu-

sic-hall” variety production. Yet this change of style was precisely what brought back a new, younger and more sophisticated audience that had hitherto shifted its interest from the circus to the more fashionable variety stage.

Jérôme Medrano, who had spent time among the well-educated and affluent youth of his generation, was well aware of this shift. He also intended to bring back top circus acts that had deserted the ring for the more lucrative variety stage. Grock, who had learned most of his craft at Medrano and whom Jérôme had known since childhood, had become a major international star on the variety circuit, a status among clowns that only the Fratellinis had acquired in the circus ring.

Jérôme had not been raised as a circus insider, taught to believe in the circus world’s unspoken law proclaiming that artists should accept relatively low wages and, more often than not, harsh working conditions. Top circus acts that could work for more money and in more comfortable surroundings in variety theatres had ceased to believe in these old tenets, a fact Jérôme had indeed noticed. In February 1930, he signed his first contract with Grock, offering him the price and conditions he had enjoyed at the Empire. It was an expensive proposition, but Grock’s act was about 40 minutes long, which would have required four or five individual acts to replace, and his name alone was sure to sell tickets.

Although Grock’s agent was his brother-in-law, Dante Ospiri, negotiations had been held on a very personal level between Jérôme and Grock. Nonetheless, Jérôme had appreciated Ospiri’s business style, and hired him as Medrano’s booking agent.

In April 1930, the great Portuguese equestrian Roberto de Vasconcellos was featured at Medrano. Vasconcellos, who was new to the circus, did not like to handle his own engagements, and he signed a ten-year contract with Jérôme, in effect making him his exclusive manager and agent. At the outbreak of World War II, Jérôme would send Vasconcellos to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in the United States, where the famous equestrian became a long-time fixture.

The 1930-31 season opened with the star-clowns of the

now-defunct Cirque de Paris, Antonet & Béby, and in October, the world’s greatest juggler, the legendary Enrico Rastelli, became the star of the show. Although he was born into a circus family, the phenomenal Rastelli had long switched to the variety stage, where he enjoyed top-billing and top money. It was the first time he had appeared in a circus ring in France. Medrano’s always-efficient press department made it an exceptional event, and crowds filled the seats to see Rastelli. Another coup was, in December, the first appearance in a circus ring of the American transvestite trapeze and tight-wire artist Barquette, one of the brightest and most talked-about stars of the variety stage.

Grock made his first appearance at Medrano in January-February 1931. The circus sold out for his full run of five weeks. Jérôme’s policy of hiring top-flight acts brought to his circus a new audience that found at Medrano the same quality of presentation they experienced in the best variety theaters. They discovered in the process clowns and other variety acts they had never seen on stage, some of whom they quickly adopted as their new favorites. Jérôme was creating a modern-day following as well as a fresh crop of circus stars.

The 1931-32 season also saw the debut of Georges Loyal as “Régisseur de piste.”

At the new Medrano, the Régisseur was more than a ringmaster and a presenter; he was the clowns’ straight man, and for eight years, all Medrano’s star-clowns interacted with Georges Loyal in the ring, respectfully addressing him as “Monsieur Loyal.” The name stuck to such an extent that, in time, all French ringmasters became known as Monsieur Loyal, and this became the French generic term for ringmaster.

Everything was going well, but Jérôme was concerned by the

situation of his circus building, of which he was still just the tenant, albeit without any constraints as long as he paid his rent. The circus building had become the property of the Saint family, a rich and powerful family of French industrialists who ran the Saint Frères company, France’s foremost Hessian manufacturer, makers of ropes, canvas covers, tarpaulins, tents and even circus big tops. Roger Saint, who was in charge of the family’s holdings, informed Jérôme that the



Les Fratellinis (left to right: Albert, François and Paul) in Berlin, 1932. Jérôme Medrano had fired his step-father, Rodophe Bonten, in part because he resented Bonten’s dismissal of the Fratellinis, the very popular stars of Cirque Medrano, in 1928.

Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Berlin

property was divided between members of the family, most of whom were satisfied with the steady income it provided and were unwilling to sell. Jérôme had no choice but to be content with the situation.

Back in May of 1930, Jérôme Medrano had made his first trip to New York, where he met up with his closest friend, Maurice Chevalier, the popular French singer who had become a Hollywood film star. They visited Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey at Madison Square Garden. For years to follow, there would be a constant flow of acts between Medrano and Ringling. Then Chevalier took his friend to Hollywood, where Jérôme (who was a huge cinema enthusiast) established contacts he would use later. Meanwhile, in August, a new lighting system was installed in the circus, including modern projector lights affixed on the columns around the house, equipped with rolling gels that allowed changing their color automatically. It was true theatrical lighting, hitherto unheard of in the circus world.

During a scouting trip to Italy in 1931, Jérôme discovered a little-known Italian circus family whose members were exceptional equestrians, able to present a large variety of acts. He signed the Cristiani family for the entire 1931-32 season. John Ringling saw them at Medrano, and two years later the Cristianis went to work with Ringling-Barnum in the United States. That season also saw the emergence of the auguste Rhum as a major clown star, and the tight-wire somersaulter Con Colleano who made a profound impact and became the new talk of the town. The Andreu-Rivels, with Charlie Rivel's impersonation of Charlie Chaplin on the flying trapeze, were another hit that season. At the end of February, Medrano presented "La Revue de Medrano," with music by Maurice Yvain (1891-1945), which ran successfully for five weeks, before the return of Grock in April. It was a very good season.

Innovation and Expansion

In September 1932, Jean Coupan left the Cirque d'Hiver and replaced André Legrand-Chabrier as Medrano's Secrétaire Général. For someone of Coupan's imagination and en-

ergy, Medrano was indeed the place to be. The new season was one of innovations. It saw the creation of the Club des Amis de Medrano (Friends of Medrano Association), the embryo of a circus school for children aged eight and up, which proved very popular. Medrano's printed program became a magazine, with articles chronicling the circus and the major artists of each new show that was now renewed every two weeks. Louis Merlin produced a regular radio broadcast from Medrano, mirroring the magazine, with interviews and news. Medrano was definitely not an ordinary circus.

In November, for the first time since the Nouveau Cirque's demise, Medrano presented a water pantomime, *Le Cirque sous l'Eau*, with an army of clowns, beautiful "naïades" in an aquatic ballet, and a battalion of 16 showgirls. The pool equipment had been leased from the famous lion trainer Alfred Schneider's circus in Germany. The water show ran successfully for three months. The legendary equestrienne Therese Renz, who was 73 and had not been seen in Paris since 1900, the superlative Russian juggler Massimiliano Truzzi, and Con Colleano were among the 1932-33 season's highlights.

In 1932, Jérôme Medrano, through his father-in-law, purchased the semi-construction of Alexandre Palisse, who had just passed away. On September 30, 1932, he relaunched it as the itinerant Cirque Medrano in the port city

of Le Havre. It was a classy and modern piece of equipment that was built to travel easily. The construction was heated, had a good lighting system, a coco mat in the ring, and was elegantly furnished with theatre folding seats. It was perfect for representing the illustrious Parisian circus in large provincial cities, where it was erected for two weeks to one month in association with large regional fairs.

Jérôme ensured that the itinerant Medrano's program

reflected the quality of his Parisian shows. The inaugural production included the clowns Dario-Bario, the famous bar-to-bar flying act of the Zemgannos, the American acrobatic dancer Barbara La May, and the spectacular jockey act of the Ricono-Strulas. The Medrano construction toured every year until the end of 1937, and kept the route established



This watercolor by Marthe and Juliette Vesque captures Jérôme Medrano's traveling show, Medrano Voyageur, at the Porte d'Auteuil in Paris, February 1936.

MuCEM, Marseille France

by Palisse, visiting the same cities at the same periods, and thus building a faithful provincial audience.

In 1937, the Medrano construction starred Grock. However, the great clown was not as adulated in the French provinces as he was in European capitals such as Paris, Berlin and London. The tour did not meet expectations. Grock, who was not used to performing in front of empty seats, broke his contract before the end of the tour. Still, this disappointment was not what led Jérôme to abandon the construction at the end of the season. The closing was related to another short-lived touring venture, and perhaps the most promising of Jérôme Medrano's projects, the tenting show known as Medrano Voyageur (traveling Medrano).

Medrano Voyageur

The Medrano construction had allowed Jérôme Medrano to make his circus known beyond the confines of the French capital. However, he had succeeded in the limited market of only a few major cities. The construction was not designed for quick moves and short stays, and its outreach remained limited. Jérôme wanted to make Medrano a household name all over the country, and in 1935, with this in mind, he laid out plans for a modern tented show, built on the model of what he considered Europe's best and most advanced touring circus, Circus Sarrasani.

When Gaston Desprez, the Cirque d'Hiver's lessee, lost his job and his lease, he put the equipment of his Cirque Fratellini up for sale.

Jérôme eventually acquired it at a good price, although it needed serious refreshing. The big top was also in poor shape, so Jérôme ordered a new one from Europe's premier tentmaker, Stromeier in Constanzt, Germany. Jérôme had wanted to adopt the new tent design introduced by Sarrasani, a round big top with four poles in square. However, too many places in France could not accommodate a large round big top. So Jérôme settled for an elongated tent, a classic four-pole in line.



This poster, designed by Jacques Bonneau (1898-1971), promoted the appearance of the Cairolis on the short-lived Cirque Medrano travelling big top in 1936.

Pierre-Robert Lévy Collection, Paris

The new Medrano Voyageur sported a white big top with the name Medrano written in red letters on each side, and a colorful rainbow-like façade. The rolling stock was painted red, with "Medrano" placed on diagonal yellow bands on the sides of each vehicle. The fencing was also painted red and yellow. There was a powerful hot-air generator to heat the tent in the cold season. Everything was immaculate. The ring and house crews were dressed in resplendent red uniforms adorned with gold trimmings, and even the tent crew

wore uniform overalls, with the name Medrano on their back. Unlike Sarraani, though, the circus traveled by rail.

The setup inside the tent was even more noteworthy. There was a stage behind the ring, and the 20-piece band was installed in an orchestra pit between the stage and the ring. The ring entrances were located at each side of the stage. This configuration permitted a fast-paced show with acts or intermezzi performed on stage during ring changes, and acts exiting the ring on one side, while others entered on the other.

The show opened at the Porte d'Auteuil in Paris on February 26, 1936. The program offered the high quality that was expected from Medrano. Headliners such as the tiger trainer Togare, "The Valentino of the Ring;" the clowns Cairolì, Porto & Carletto; the Clérans, then the hottest aerial act on the market; Henry Rancy's equestrian acts; and several large acrobatic troupes, were among many others top attractions. Opening night was hailed by Parisian critics, and the long provincial tour that followed included a succession of sold-out houses in major cities such as Lyon and Marseilles.

Rachel Medrano, the attractive young co-director, had what the French called a "tempérament." Her marriage to Jérôme had been a hurried affair, and there were rumors of indiscretions. Rachel and Jérôme's marriage was quickly disintegrating.

In that poisonous atmosphere, Medrano Voyageur began its second season in February 1937. The Fratellinis, now back with Medrano, headed a copious program that included the celebrated cat trainer Vojteck Trubka in his French debut, the flying trapeze act of the Zemgannos, the Carrés' horse acts from the Netherlands, and as a special attraction, the track-and-field champion racer, Jules Ladoumègue, a French sport hero who raced around the ring against a horse.

Yet Jérôme noticed that the box-office statements did not always match what he saw in the house. The Baquets were "cooking the books," and part of the income was diverted into their pockets. Medrano was a man of impulse, as he had already shown when he married Rachel and fired Rodolphe Bonten. He proved it once more. On August 5, he suddenly showed up on the circus lot, fired his management staff (most of whom were Baquet's people), and closed the circus in mid-tour.

The performers were let go, and Medrano Voyageur returned to its winter quarters in Saint-Denis, near Paris. Six months later, in January 1938, after its last contracted performance in Marseilles, Jérôme also closed the construction. The equipment for both circuses was put up for sale. Rachel packed and left the Rue des Martyrs' apartment. The marriage was over. Jérôme was now free to focus his attention exclusively on his circus in Paris.

Before The Storm

Medrano continued to present star variety acts rarely



Togare with his tigers at Cirque Medrano in 1937.

Gaston Paris, Gustave Soury Archive

seen in a circus ring, such as Joe Jackson, The Bicycle Thief, or to reveal extraordinary performers making their Parisian (and French) debut, such as the Indian bouncing-rope acrobat Kannan Bombayo.

In June 1934, Jérôme installed new, more comfortable seats, similar to those used in movie houses. Clowns, as always, remained Medrano's main drawing card. In 1936, Medrano offered a comic pantomime, *Rhum à Rome* (Rhum in Rome), featuring the celebrated auguste Rhum, his partner, the clown Manetti, and another popular clown duet, Alex and Porto. The piece also featured the dazzling Bluebell Girls, who after World War II, would become the iconic dancing drill team of the legendary Lido of Paris.

Jérôme lured the Fratellinis back to Medrano for the 1936-37 season. He also hired Jean Granier, a popular "chansonnier" (a typically Parisian stand-up comedian/lyricist/singer with a bent for topical and political jokes). Granier covered the changes in the ring, performing in spotlights while the ring was dark, with an assortment of wisecracks. It was the blueprint of a style adopted afterward by other French ringmasters. Later, a speaking "auguste de soirée" would exchange quips with the host, establishing a tradition that would be emulated by other circuses. The first of these speaking duets was Emile Recordier, a former journalist, who replaced Jean Granier the following season, along with the auguste Boulicot. They made their debut together in the ring after having been a popular fixture of the Empire's stage for many years. The true ringmaster was still Georges Loyal, but Recordier & Boulicot helped define Medrano's hosting style.

In the summer of 1938, a major revamping of the house was carried out. The boxes and the foyer behind them were suppressed, and the resulting space was filled with additional seats. Likewise, the old promenoir at the back of the house disappeared to give way to an extra row of seats. The house

capacity in premium seats was thus substantially increased, which resulted in a higher income when a show was successful.

Fear of a possible war with Germany was mounting, and by 1938, business began to suffer. After the disappointing tour of his brother-in-law Grock, Dante Ospiri, Medrano's booking agent, left the circus and was replaced by Emile Audiffred and Félix Marouani, who ran a well-known talent agency. To renew the audience's interest, Recordier came up with the idea of another comic pantomime for Rhum, *On a enlevé la Femme à Barbe* (the bearded lady has been abducted). It was a huge success.

In November 1938, Jérôme attended the Jubilee of Berlin's Wintergarten, where he had the dubious privilege of being introduced to Adolph Hitler. The following month, the Fratellinis were back at Medrano, and in January 1939, Jérôme experimented by introducing the Peter Sisters, a trio of heavy-set African-American jazz singers and tap dancers, whom he had discovered in the United States.

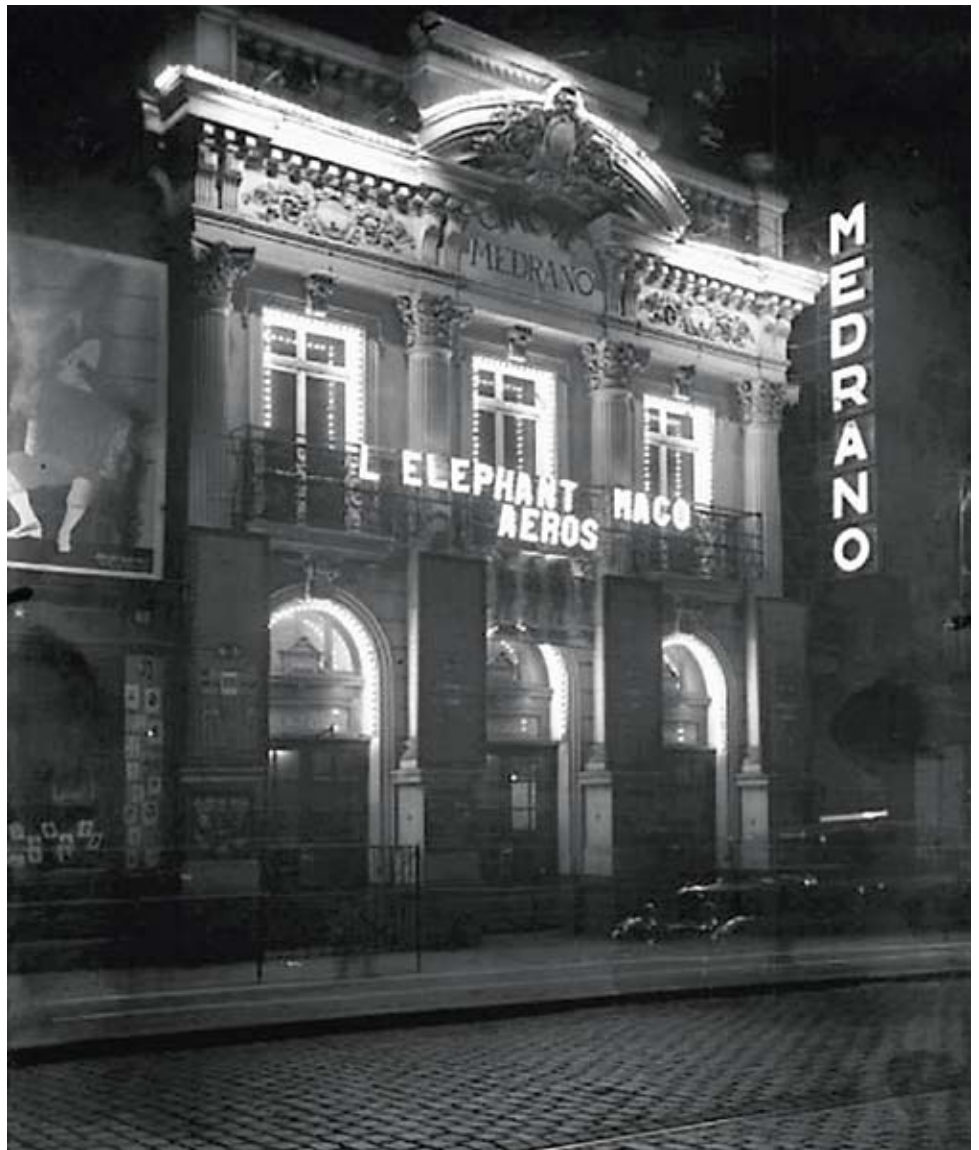
They were followed by a circus op-eretta written by Emile Recordier with music by Vincent Scotto (1876-1952), *Le Fils de Buffalo-Bill* (Buffalo Bill's son). It had the largest cast ever seen at Medrano with 105 artists, including a crowd of extras and the 16 Helena Stars, a troupe of English showgirls. All these, plus a great number of props that included a full Western wagon train crossing the ring, must have made the already confined dressing rooms and backstage area more cramped than ever. Despite the presence of the upcoming singer and former Olympian, Clément Duhour, the production was only moderately successful.

In May 1939, Félix Vitry replaced Jean Coupan as Medrano's Secrétaire Général. Vitry took care of Medrano's marketing and public relations until 1958. Meanwhile, Jérôme sailed back to the United States and met with Zeppo Marx, the brother of Groucho, Chico and Harpo Marx, in Los Angeles. Zeppo ran a major talent agency in Hollywood and represented the Marx Brothers. While in Hollywood, Jérôme also met with Stan Laurel in an effort to sign him and his partner, Oliver Hardy. Neither deal was finalized because the European situation made the artists hesitant to sign a contract for work in France. Jérôme did manage to

sign the former Hollywood cowboy star Tom Mix, but it was a bittersweet victory. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, immediately prompting Great Britain, France and their European allies to declare war on Germany. World War II had started, and Tom Mix's contract was nullified.

The War Years

Jérôme Medrano was drafted. To avoid the closure of his circus, he sublet it to Audiffred and Marouani, who took over its management. However, in May 1940, the Germans began their invasion of France, and Medrano closed its doors. On June 14, 1940 they occupied Paris. In this tragic atmosphere, the death of Paul Fratellini, on June 18, went completely unnoticed. Félix Marouani, who was Jewish, had already taken refuge in the South of France. Emile Audiffred also chose to leave Paris. The Saint family became concerned about seeing the building without supervision, and they began contacting



Medrano's façade at night promotes Maco the elephant, slack-wire comedian Germain Aeros, and clown Jean-Marie Cairol who appears on the billboard at the upper left.

private collection

potential buyers among the French circus community.

In November 1940, the Propagandastaffel (the German propaganda service in Nazi-occupied France) assigned the Parisian circuses' management to Paula Busch, who placed her son-in-law, Emil Wacker, at the helm of Medrano. Then Paula Busch took over the Cirque d'Hiver in December. The Nazis expected this to help build a positive image of the German occupiers. It lasted only the three-month trial period scheduled by the Propagandastaffel. Parisians did not consider watching German acts in the company of Wehrmacht soldiers to be their idea of good entertainment.

Jérôme Medrano finally returned to Paris to check on his circus, which was still under Busch management. He immediately signed a new nine-year renewable lease with Roger Saint, whose family still owned the building. Unfortunately, its impending sale had been announced at a very bad time for Jérôme, who was not in a position to buy. His divorce had turned into a convoluted and lengthy litigation. Since his wife had been nominally co-director of the Medrano circuses, the divorce was not only a personal separation but also a professional and financial parting. As a result, Jérôme was buried in complex and expensive legal proceedings, which the war and the German Occupation had not made easier.

At that point, Jérôme was living with Denise Baillard (1915-1964), a former dancer with the Bluebell Girls. To protect himself and his circus from possible financial and legal problems resulting from his divorce, he created a new company, S.E.S.V. (Société d'Exploitation de Spectacles de Variétés) whose principal was Denise, and to which he transferred the circus's lease and other assets that were in his name. On August 18, 1941, Denise gave birth to Jérôme's first child, Daniel. Then the new family traveled to the free zone in the South of France, where they rented a villa at Saint-Jean Cap Ferrat. Marcelle Roulet, Denise's sister, was put in charge of the Parisian circus's administration. Jérôme returned to Paris only when business called him.

Jérôme Medrano had reopened his circus on April 11, 1941 with a show headlined by a host of well-known clowns: Pipo and Tony Sosman; Alex Bugny & Achille Zavatta (the latter would emerge as a major clowning star after the War); and Boulicot, Tony Bastien, Dédé Gruss, and Little Walter, Jr. In spite of the circumstances, Medrano was intent on remaining a joyous circus. It was not easy, however, to find good circus acts to work in Paris during the German Occupation. Jérôme had to resort to hiring popular French singers, comedians, and actors to fill the void.

In 1941, the actor and comedian Gilles Margaritis had produced a hilarious and successful variety show at the ABC Theatre in Paris, *Les Chesterfollies*. This show was true to Margaritis's particular sense of humor, a paean to absurdist and unbridled comedy in the style of the 1938 hit Broadway musical, *Hellzapoppin*. Jérôme asked Margaritis to create a new version of his *Chesterfollies* for Medrano. *Les Chesterfol-*

lies 43 opened in January 1943 and remained on the bill for four months. The show saw the Medrano debut of 16-year-old acrobatic dancer Violette Schmidt, who would later play an important role in Jérôme's life and in Medrano's history.

The 1942-43 season was a good one. Adding to the celebratory mood, on September 5, 1943, Denise Baillard had given birth to Jérôme's second son, Patrick. However, at the end of the year, the Saint family finally auctioned off their circus property. The wealthy Bougliones, tenants of the Cirque d'Hiver, bid against the owners of the Cirque Pinder. As a final incentive, the Bougliones produced bags of gold they had brought in the trunk of their car and offered to pay cash. They won the prize and became the new owners of the circus building and its land. Jérôme Medrano, who still had seven years on his lease, was now the tenant of his competition. However, he was nowhere to be seen. He had joined the French Resistance.

In February 1944, Medrano presented *Les Chesterfollies 44*. This came too soon on the heels of the previous edition, and Parisians now had something else to give them solace. The Allied Forces had landed in Italy. In April, Jérôme's divorce from Rachel Baquet was at long last finalized. On June 6, the Allied Forces landed in Normandy, and on August 25, the Free French Forces liberated Paris. Jérôme Medrano resurfaced under the U.S. Army's uniform. He had been a Liaison Officer between the U.S. Army and the Free French Forces. On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered and World War II was over.

The Floor Show

When Medrano reopened for the 1944-45 season, the printed program was in English and French, to attract the American and English forces stationed in Paris. It listed Jérôme Medrano as Artistic Director. Marcelle Roulet was Business Manager. Rocordier was still the show host, and the delightful auguste Lorient had replaced Boulicot. More acts were now available, although international acts were still difficult to attract. Pipo Sosman and Rhum were the clown stars of the season.

In April 1945, Jérôme Medrano and Denise Baillard were married in Boulogne-Billancourt, a Paris suburb where they lived and where the circus had its warehouse. Jérôme, Denise and their children spent the summer in their villa at Saint-Jean Cap Ferrat, on the French Riviera, and the circus re-opened in September 1945 with a show more in synch with the times, ushering in a new era for Medrano.

The first half of the show featured ten traditional circus acts including the clowns Nino & Mimile. It also featured the debut of Rose Gold, in a sensational solo trapeze performance that prefigured the legendary Rose Gold Trio, whose world debut occurred in November at Medrano. During intermission, the ring was covered with a wooden floor. The acts selected for the second half had a style more suited for varieties, cabarets and nightclubs, and a special



Across the Boulevard Rochechouart in Paris is the legendary Cirque Medrano in April 1948. The featured attraction that month was the Triska high-wire troupe.

private collection

Master of Ceremonies introduced them. Jérôme called it the “Floor Show.” The first Floor Show starred The Craddocks, a celebrated comedy tumbling act presented by François Fratellini’s sons who had been featured in variety theatres and nightclubs all over the world. The famous dancer-singer-musician, Maria Valente, a huge star of the variety stage before the war, was featured in the December production, and 18-year-old Violette Schmidt returned to Medrano in January.

Circus purists did not care much for the new Medrano formula, even though the more contemporary flavor was widely talked about by the press. In January 1947, Medrano reverted to traditional circus programs without a marked difference between the first and the second halves of the show.

To America and Back

By the beginning of the 1946-47 season, Jérôme had put together an efficient administrative team at the helm of his circus with his sister-in-law Marcelle Roulet as General Manager, her husband Maurice Roulet as Administrative Manager, and the former cat trainer Joseph Trubka as Régisseur. Félix Vitry was placed in charge of marketing and publicity, and, in a less alluring but still consequential position, Paulette Decaplane (Denise Medrano’s other sister) took care of the bar and concessions. Medrano was once more

a family affair. With his team in place, Jérôme, Denise and their children sailed to New York in December, and then moved to California, where they settled in the Westwood area of Los Angeles.

In part, Jérôme came to America to scout fresh talent for his circus. In September 1947, the first show of Medrano’s 50th Anniversary Season (1947-48) was headlined by the legendary Hollywood comedian Buster Keaton. Keaton had reached the nadir of his Hollywood career with a dreadful series of B-movies co-starring the comedian Jimmy Durante, and after a bout with depression and alcoholism, he had returned to the variety stage with his new wife, Eleanor. When the opportunity arose, Jérôme had immediately signed Keaton.

Buster Keaton’s appearance was a huge hit, and Jérôme quickly offered him a return engagement. He had also contracted the Peter Sisters, who returned to Paris and followed Keaton in October. Another Hollywood luminary, the phenomenal tap dancer and singer, Harold Nicholas, headlined the November show.

Jérôme and Denise Medrano managed their Parisian circus from afar. The family took root in California, where they purchased a large villa in Encino. The post-war years were a boon for circuses all over Europe, and business was going strong. In 1949, Denise and Jérôme began to put together an all-American revue, which would be titled *Hol-*



Jérôme Medrano c. 1952.

private collection

lywood *Rhythm Extravaganza*, and Jérôme returned to Paris in November 1950 to prepare for a European tour of the show. Another reason for his return was to sign a four-year extension of his lease that was obtained by his lawyers to compensate for his war-years losses.

In Paris, Jérôme realized that he had conceived his Hollywood extravaganza on an American scale, much too large for his circus. It had to be re-tailored into a lighter version to be manageable and profitable at home and on tour. There were also problems with parts of the scenic equipment that were not ready in time, and others that just did not work. After several delays, the show opened in January 1951. If the French audiences did not warm up to the American comic Jérôme had brought with him, they certainly appreciated the legendary one-legged tap dancer Peg-Leg Bates, who was the true revelation of the show, and the imposing 36-girl chorus line.

The show, which was mostly a traditional American variety revue, failed to attract Parisians. It was modified with a more “circus” feel and renamed *Hollywood Follies*. Among the European artists hired to complete the line-up of circus acts were The Craddocks and the Rose Gold Trio. Jérôme Medrano’s American production managed to run for five months, but it never really took off. It was presented after-



Parisians enter Cirque Medrano’s front doors to see the clown Grock in his post-war return in January 1952.

Pierre J. Dannès photograph



Buster and Eleanor Keaton backstage at the Cirque Medrano in Paris in 1954.

Pierre J. Dannès photograph

wards at the Théâtre des Variétés in Brussels and shut down after that. It was indeed a disappointment for Jérôme. His name, however, had never appeared anywhere in connection with the production. It was produced by a Jerry E. Mordan, which was an Americanized anagram Jérôme had adopted for the occasion.

Medrano began casting his 1951-52 season. Among other acts, he re-booked one of his favorite performers, the acrobatic dancer Violette Schmidt. Violette was now 23 years old, a beautiful woman, and Jérôme had fallen head-over-heels for her when she unexpectedly came to see one of his performances. They soon began a very conspicuous affair, which was not to the liking of Jérôme's General Manager and sister-in-law, Marcelle Roulet. Marcelle informed her sister, Denise Medrano, and had a falling-out with Jérôme. It was once again a poisonous family situation that affected the circus. Jérôme reacted swiftly. He fired the Roulets and took back the full management of his circus. And, as he would admit much later in an interview, he "forgot" his family in America.

The Early Fifties

Jérôme Medrano put together a new managerial team, with Léon Marchoux as General Manager and Marcel Hau-riac as "Secrétaire Général," two well-known figures in the circus and variety world. Josef Trubka kept his position as Régisseur Général, and marketing and advertising remained in the hands of Félix Vitry. The talented Germaine Mordant (1911-1968), an old friend of Jérôme's who came to Medra-

no in 1947, remained the music conductor, the only woman ever to hold this position in a major circus. A new, very promising ringmaster/host, Jean Dréna, joined the group.

The Parisian press was elated by the return of Jérôme Medrano and saluted the event as a possible rebirth of the Cirque Medrano of yore. They were not disappointed. The 1951-52 season is still regarded today as one of the best seasons ever put together by the Parisian circus. Jérôme offered 14 shows with a cornucopia of some of the best acts in the business. Among several old favorites was the Dutch high-school equestrian Otto Schumann, whose success was such that his contract had to be extended twice. The Charlivels, Violette Schmidt, the singer acrobat Gino Donati, the high-wire troupe of Bob Gerry, the young hand-balancer prodigy Little John, and the extremely talented lion and tiger trainer Vojtech Trubka were among the many hits that season.

The clowns had a place of choice in these shows, which critics praised as the "rebirth of true circus." Boulicot, Lorient, and the American auguste Billy Beck, kept the show moving at Jean Dréna's side, and Nino & Charly, Rhum, Polo Rivel and his children, Pipo & Béby, and the new Barrios delivered the entrées that kept the audience laughing. Additionally, in January 1952, Grock returned to Medrano for the first time since World War II. Many European directors had shunned him for having performed in Nazi Germany during the conflict. This was Grock's last appearance in Paris. He was 72. He would die seven years later, after a mildly successful farewell European tour with a circus bearing his name.

In September 1951, Denise Medrano had returned to Paris with her children in a last-ditch effort to save her marriage. It did not work. A divorce procedure was set in motion, which was as complex as the previous one because of the same intrusion of business matters into Jérôme's personal affairs. After a very successful 1951-52 season, Jérôme Medrano and Violette Schmidt, now a bona-fide couple, went on a prospecting tour of the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In October 1952, Buster Keaton was back at Medrano. He was not the only successful clown that season. In March 1953, the famous playwright, filmmaker, director and actor Sacha Guitry (1885-1957) wrote in a French magazine a dithyramb on Rhum, whom he had just seen on television in a sketch the great auguste had performed at Medrano. In it, Guitry placed Rhum above every known comic, including Charlie Chaplin. Rhum's sketch had been mute. He was dying of throat cancer. He passed away in October, to the immense chagrin of his many admirers and colleagues.

On September 16, 1953, Medrano hosted the first broadcast of a circus television show conceived by Gilles Margari-tis. The production became *La Piste aux Etoiles* (the ring of the stars), one of French television's longest-running shows. *La Piste aux Etoiles* was shot intermittently at Medrano, but only for a short time. Jérôme's landlord, the Bougliones, forbade their building to be used for anything other than pure



Violette and Jérôme Medrano, with the French actor Michel Simon (center), c. 1952.

Pierre J. Dannès photograph

circus performances, which implied that the circus could not be used as a television studio. This interdiction was part of the Bougliones' efforts to discourage Jérôme, and in 1960, the television show found a new home at the Cirque d'Hiver.

Also in 1953, Jérôme had produced a show under the Medrano banner at the Palais des Sports of Liège, in Belgium, with the animals of the German Circus Williams presented by Adolf Althoff. During the spring-summer season of 1954, he launched a traveling Grand Cirque Russe in association with the Cirque Beoutour. This was part of a flurry of extra-Parisian circus activity that kept Jérôme busy. The year 1954 was to be the last of Medrano's extended original lease.

The Survival Years

Jérôme began to explore legal options at his disposal to retain control of his circus, which the Bougliones were eager to take away from him. Legal wrangling that would last eight years began in 1955. Not everything was bad, however. On November 24, 1954, Violette Schmidt had given birth to their daughter, Françoise. Although Jérôme's divorce procedure with Denise was still ongoing, he was intent on marrying Violette. In the spring of 1955, Violette announced she was expecting a second child. Jérôme III was born February 22, 1956. Denise returned to the United States with her children in the summer of 1956, after being awarded the Medranos' American properties.

In 1955, Jérôme made a deal with the Cirque Gruss-Jeannet, which was ending its long association with Radio Luxembourg, under the patronage of which it had toured as the very successful Radio-Circus. They launched a new Medrano "voyageur," and under its colors Gruss-Jeannet toured in 1956. Behind the scenes, the Gruss brothers and Lucien Jeannet struck a potentially more rewarding bargain with



Corry Vermeeren with Erie Klant's polar bears in Cavalcade sur Glace 60 at the Cirque Medrano in Paris, 1960.

Pierre J. Dannès photograph

Jean Richard. Their plan was to tour as Cirque Jean Richard in 1957 with the popular actor and comedian (and amateur animal trainer and circus buff) as its star. Jean Richard had been featured at Medrano in 1955, where he had presented Circus Knie's group of African elephants. Jérôme saw the association of Jean Richard and Gruss-Jeannet as a double betrayal.

In spite of his precarious situation, Jérôme Medrano continued to present excellent programs on the Boulevard de Rochechouart. Gilles Margaritis returned in 1956 with his *Chesterfollies*, whose star, Achille Zavatta, had become France's most popular auguste thanks to his frequent appearances on Margaritis's hit television show, *La Piste aux Étoiles*. Zavatta displayed the full range of his many circus talents, from bareback riding to a comedy act with a group of lions.

In September 1956, the Fővárosi Nögyircusz of Budapest opened the 1956-57 season, and remained on the bill until the end of October. At that time, the Hungarian insurrection began and Soviet troops entered Budapest. What was a normal engagement suddenly became an event of political significance. In November, Medrano hosted the German Circus Williams, albeit without its young star, Gunther Gebel-Williams: his group of eleven elephants was much too large for Medrano's cramped quarters. In December, Jérôme

helped produce the *Grand Cirque 57* at Paris's Palais des Sports, a huge American-style circus spectacular with three rings and two stages. He also had two Christmas shows running at the same time in large arenas in Marseille and Lyon, in addition to Medrano's Christmas program.

In March 1957, the extremely popular French comedian Fernand Raynaud (1926-1973) was the star of the show. Raynaud's humor was mostly spoken, but he was also an excellent mime. His turn included a parody of a ballerina on tight wire and a very good impersonation of Charlie Chaplin. Then, in September, 80-year-old Albert Fratellini, the last surviving member of the fabled trio, began what would be his last circus season at Medrano.

The 1957-58 season saw major changes at Medrano. Jean Laporte (1908-1997), a legendary circus bandleader who had succeeded Germaine Mordant in 1953, left and was replaced by Hubert Dewaele. In September 1958, Marcel Ballester, a former singer turned clown and ringmaster, replaced Jean Dréna who had retired, as Medrano's host/ringmaster. Félix Vitry also left to take the management of the Bobino Music-Hall, and Jacques Prély, a former singer and lyricist, became Medrano's Régisseur Général.

Two of Medrano's old pillars, the augustes Boulicot and Béby passed away in 1958. However, a new generation of very talented clowns was ready: Achille Zavatta; the Barrios (who spent the 1956-57 season at Medrano); the Rudi-Llantas; and Kiko, Popol and Baba Fratellini (the former Cradocks and the sons of François Fratellini) who made their debut at Medrano in February 1958.

Swan Song

On January 6, 1958, the divorce of Jérôme Medrano and Denise Baillard was finalized. On April 28, Jérôme married Amélie Violette Schmidt in Paris. Violette Medrano would take an important role in the running of the circus, both administratively and artistically, in the last four years of its existence. Meanwhile, Jérôme continued to present a string of first-rate programs, in spite of the fact that he could not secure acts very far in advance. He was under the constant threat of having to surrender the circus building whenever his legal proceedings ended.

In September 1958, Medrano offered a spectacle titled *Bravissimo*, conceived by Jacques Prély. It was an Italian-themed musical extravaganza featuring the Doriss Girls (the famous dancers of the neighboring Moulin-Rouge cabaret) and several good acts, but which was plagued with technical problems. It lasted only four weeks. Following this debacle, comedy and humor became Medrano's main fare in 1958 and 1959, with a profusion of clowns, some remaining on the bill for several months in a row. There were also several acts of first magnitude. Among them the hand-balancer Little John, Philippe Gruss and his leopards, Maryse Bégary on the trapeze, Dany Renz in his famous jockey act "Robin Hood," and the legendary Spanish star of the Washington



Violette and Jérôme Medrano in the ring of Cirque Medrano at the end of the last performance on January 7, 1963.

Keystone-France

trapeze, Pinito del Oro.

In February 1959, following the advice of his lawyers, Jérôme created a new corporate entity in all probability to generate new legal hurdles for the Bougliones, and to continue to stall the situation. When the 1959-60 season began in September, Violette Medrano was conspicuously listed in the program as the circus's sole Director. She was also the Director of the new corporation. Although he was still at the artistic helm of his circus, Jérôme remained in the shadows.

Violette's personal touch could be felt. Medrano was modernized and refreshed, notably with usherettes in elegant and colorful dresses instead of uniforms, and the use of air freshener in the corridors and the bar to mask the smell of the menagerie. Violette also conceived the idea of an already built-up steel arena being lowered from the cupola for the cage acts. Although this was innovative, it precluded using major aerial and high-wire acts in the same program.

In May 1960, the season ended with a show titled *Cavalcade sur Glace 60*. It was entirely performed on ice. It included Erie Klant's polar-bear act presented Corry Vermeeren, Stella Fratellini and her chimpanzee Georgie, and, most amazingly, the high school act of Elvira Vonderp. The feature of the show was the former French champion ice-skater Raymonde du Bief, but its true stars were the popu-



Cirque de Montmartre poster designed by Dominique Jando, 1968

Dominique Jando Collection

lar clowns Henny, Frédy and Nello Bario, who were at the height of their creative and comedic talents.

For the 1960-61 holiday season, Medrano presented *Rêve de Clown*, a show built around the legendary clown Charlie Rivel, who had not been seen in Paris since WWII. Rivel had built over the years a rich repertoire, and had been able to adapt it to his age and to the times. The 1961-62 season saw a new orchestra conductor, the Belgian composer and sometime actor V. O. Ursmar, who would be the last of a line of remarkable conductors leading Medrano's orchestra. The new host was Jacques Demarny, a former actor, singer and prolific author of popular songs. Achille Zavatta was the star all winter long. It would be Medrano's last full season.

The End

When the 1962-63 season started in earnest, the program was again remarkable. It included the heavily adver-

tised Yves de la Cour's equestrienne protégée, Lilo, in a sensual and scantily-clad high-school act, the Jarz, one the best flying trapeze acts of the Italian school, the legendary somersaulter Atilina Segura on the tight wire, the Tovarich family of equilibrists, André Danion's sea lions, and the brilliant clowns Rudi-Llata, among others.

The holiday program featured Philippe Gruss with his leopards and the Gruss-Jeannet horses and elephants; the Spanish clowns Los Álava and the Paco Perez Trio; the amazing Billy, Vittorio and Anna Arata on the tight wire; the Japanese acrobats The Akimotos; the chimpanzees of Klaus Kropplin; Miss Chabre and her dogs; and the American crossbow shooting act of Bob Markworth and Mayana. Sadly, these artists were to be part of Medrano's very last production.

On December 15, 1962, during the Saturday matinee, the Bougliones entered the circus and took possession of their property. Three weeks later, on January 7, 1963, at the end of the last performance of their last program, Jérôme and Violette Medrano stepped into Medrano's ring to a prolonged ovation, and bade their heartbroken audience farewell. The Parisian clowns who had graced Medrano's "magic circle" over the years accompanied them, led by Kiko, Popol and Baba Fratellini, who had spent their childhood with Jérôme in what became his circus. When late in the evening, the lights finally were turned off, Medrano, "Le Cirque de Paris," ceased to exist.

Epilogue

Jérôme and Violette Medrano remained in their apartment for a few weeks, while the Bougliones renovated the circus to their needs. Once their affairs were in order, the Medranos moved to Monaco, where they settled in a rented apartment.

The Bouglione Juniors (Firmin, Sampion, Émilien, and Joseph) took over the management of the circus and renamed it Cirque de Montmartre. They were also running the mighty Bouglione traveling circus, and their father, Joseph Bouglione, and their uncle Firmin, were running the Cirque d'Hiver.

The Bougliones had commendable shows, but somehow the special magic of Medrano was gone. Gone was the sophisticated lighting, the special intimacy created by iconic hosts such as Jean Dréna and Medrano's house augustes. Gone, too, were the surprises, the unexpected novelties.

Off-season, the Cirque de Montmartre hosted non-circus events. In terms of circus, it remained but a footnote in the glorious history of the legendary house of the Boulevard de Rochechouart. Even the name Cirque de Montmartre did not stick. It continued to be referred to as Medrano.

The Cirque de Montmartre gave its last performance on January 8, 1971, in an atmosphere of general indifference. The building became a theater for a short season, and was eventually rented and became a beer hall, to the dismay of circus aficionados and old Medrano's habitués. Thereafter, it was simply forgotten until December 1973. At the end of the month, startled passersby noticed that workers had begun demolishing it. In January 1974, the building would have been 100 years old, and thus would have been automatically added to the "Inventaire des Sites" (the national inventory of landmarks). This could have prevented its demolition, since there would have been an inquiry regarding the building's historical significance.

The move provoked a public outrage, further fueled by the previous demolition of the historic Théâtre de l'Ambigu, one of Paris's oldest theatres, and, at the beginning of the year, the Gaumont Palace, Europe's largest movie house (whose walls actually encased the structure of the old Hippodrome de la Place Clichy). This would eventually lead the City of Paris to automatically place its historic theatres under protection. Today, an apartment building named Le Bouglione occupies the site. A plaque, unveiled on the building in October 2012, reminds passersby that the Cirque Fernando, Medrano and Cirque de Montmartre, once stood there.

The Medranos did not have much money left, and while Jérôme still toyed with circus projects (while acting on occasion as a boat salesman), Violette took a steady job in a bank. Circus enthusiasts, old circus acquaintances, and circus directors of a newer generation were happy to chat with Jérôme or Violette at the International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo, which they attended every year at the invitation of Prince Rainier III of Monaco.

The name Medrano reappeared briefly in 1978 when Jérôme agreed to permit the Nouveau Cirque Jean Richard to be renamed Medrano. The show lasted only three months. Jean Richard's circus empire had collapsed, and the new Medrano disappeared in its bankruptcy.

In 1987, a young circus entrepreneur, Raoul Gibault, approached Jérôme and proposed to revive Cirque Medrano. With Jérôme's approval and participation as a consultant, the new show was presented on stage in large provincial theatres. Gibault's original concept has since morphed into a full-fledged tenting circus with three units and a host of Christmas shows. Raoul Gibault runs today, under the Medrano banner, one of France's largest circus organizations.

Jérôme Medrano passed away in Monaco on November 14, 1998, in his ninety-second year. The circus world lost one of its most innovative and talented directors, a man artistically well ahead of his times, who, quite unwittingly, paved

the way for the circus of the 21st century. He was survived by his wife, Violette, two sons from his second marriage, two children from his marriage to Violette, and twelve grandchildren on both sides of the Atlantic, none of whom have continued in the circus. **Bw**

Readers can consult Dominique Jando's "Circopedia.org" website to learn more about Cirque Fernando and Cirque Medrano and the eminent place they hold in circus history. The Circopedia entry for Cirque Medrano also provides a Suggested Reading list.

about the author...

Dominique Jando, a native of France, first stepped into the ring as a clown at Cirque Medrano in Paris. Later he pursued an artistic and administrative career in both the theater and the circus. In 1974, as General Secretary of the Paris Cultural Center, he participated in the creation of France's first professional circus school, and of *Le Cirque à l'Ancienne*, which became the French National Circus.



Dominique moved to New York to join the Big Apple Circus in 1983, and served as its Associate Artistic Director for 19 years. He then worked as Creative Director of Circus Center in San Francisco. He is now Vice President and Ar-

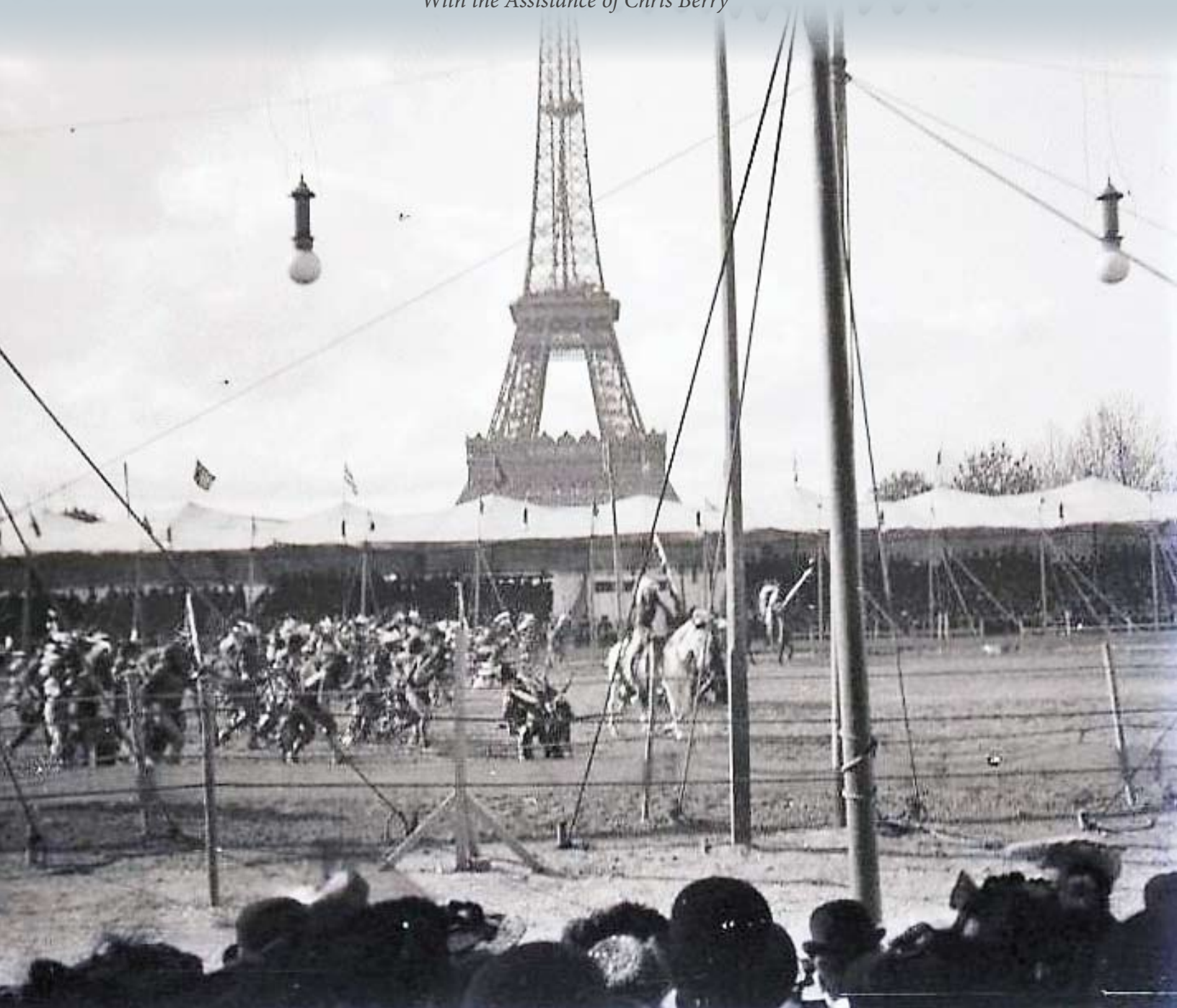
tistic Director of Lone Star Circus in Dallas, Texas, and serves on the Board of Directors of Circus Bella in San Francisco. He is also Founder and Curator of Circopedia.org, an international online circus encyclopedia.

A circus and popular entertainment historian, Dominique has published many books and articles on these subjects. He teaches classical European clowning at Circus Center's Clown Conservatory, and is a founding member of the Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, an international circus competition that has been held each winter in Paris since 1977. He has also served on the juries of international circus festivals in Europe, Russia, Mexico, and Israel.

Dominique is married to the award-winning trapeze artist and aerial arts coach Elena Panova. They presently live in San Francisco.

Cody: *An American in Paris* *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Tours of France*

*by Dr. Gérard Borg and Dr. Jeanne-Yvonne Borg, Circus Art Museum
With the Assistance of Chris Berry*



This photograph of the open-air arena shows Native Americans performing in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

Part I – The First Tour – 1889

In January of 1887, construction began on the Eiffel Tower with the expectation that it would be completed in time for the opening of the Exposition Universelle two years later. The Paris World's Fair of 1889 was envisioned as a major international event that would run from May 6 until October 31, conceived as a symbol of France's global position on the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. For over two years, 300 men worked tirelessly to erect the incredible structure, built by Gustave Eiffel and manufactured piece by piece at his factory in Levallois-Perret, just west of Paris.

About the same time the first pieces of the Tower were beginning to take shape, the Buffalo Bill Wild West arrived in England for its first overseas tour, highlighted by performances at the American Exhibition in the West Brompton area of London. Among those attending in the spring of 1887 were the Prince and Princess of Wales, followed by a private performance presented for Queen Victoria on May 11, an event quite remarkable in that Her Majesty left Windsor Castle to attend the show rather than having the entertainers brought to her as was the custom. After a year performing in the United Kingdom, Buffalo Bill Cody and his troupe returned to New York in May 1888 on board the S.S. *Persian Monarch* and immediately began a tour of the northeastern United States.

Shortly after their arrival, Cody and his partner Nate Salisbury began making plans to return to Europe for appearances in France at the Exposition Universelle. Millions were expected to visit the World's Fair, providing a natural audience for the Wild West. Time was of the essence, and by January 1889, Salisbury was back on the Continent, accompanied by Theron Clark Crawford, a former newspaper reporter who was now part of the team that would manage the tour of France.

Despite problems locating an appropriate showgrounds, Crawford told the press on April 9 that he had secured a huge venue from Félix Gustave Saussier, the Military Governor of Paris. The location would be in Neuilly, near the center of Paris, between Boulevard Victor Hugo, Avenue Villiers and Route de la Révolte. Crawford told reporters that 100 French soldiers would be invited to review the American cavalry at every performance, and of course attend the show. Crawford described the arena that would be built for seating and explained that it would be painted white, trimmed in gold, and accented with the red, white and blue associated with both France and the United States. Crawford also spoke of the convenience of the showgrounds, and the fact that commuters could reach the arena by a variety of trains, tramways and horse drawn omnibuses.

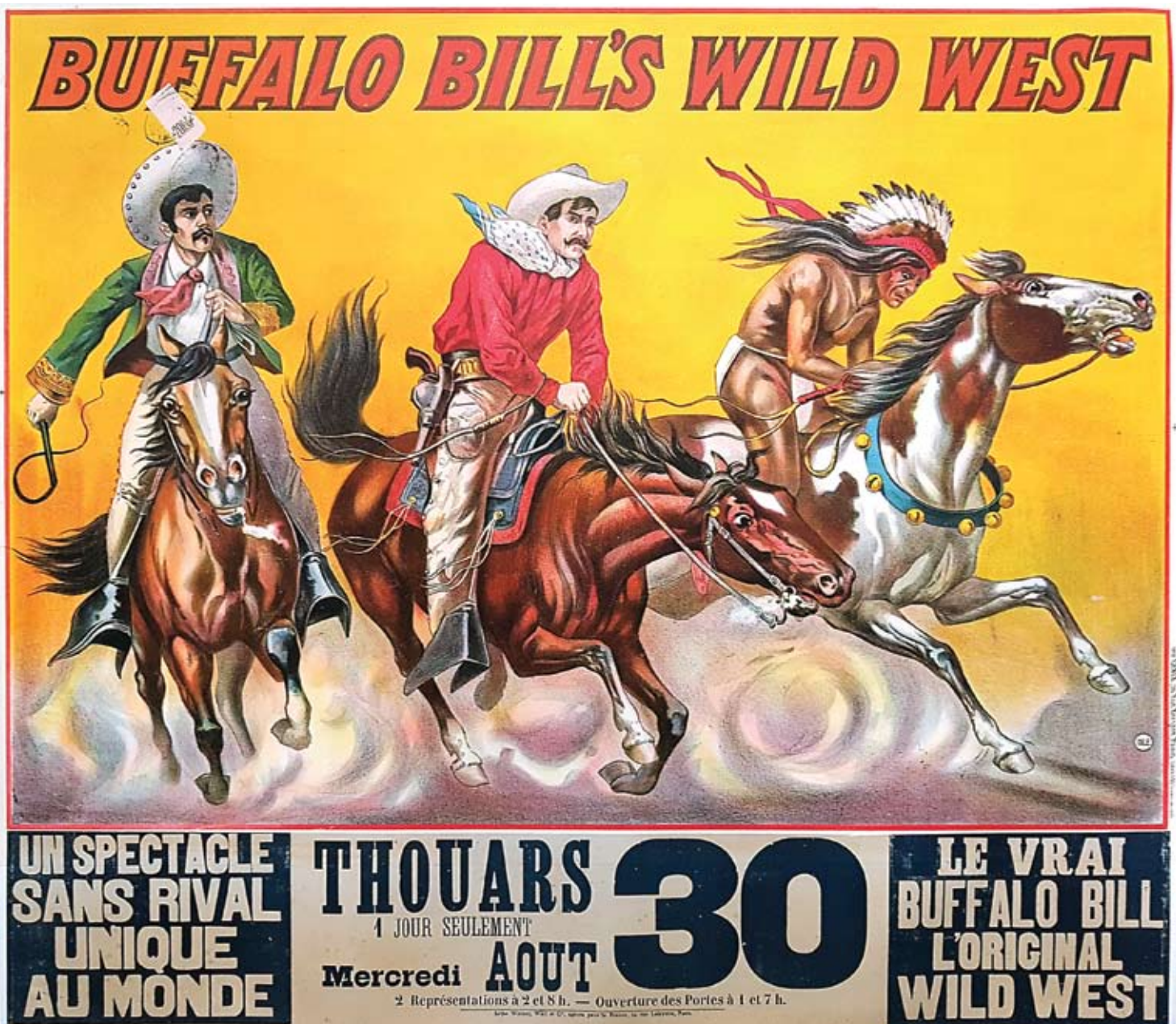
As large posters began appearing throughout the Paris metropolitan area in early April, construction of the Wild West pavilion began. More than 200 workers began clearing the space and laying the foundation for the largest arena



This watercolor of Buffalo Bill Cody was painted by F. Luis Mora (1874-1940) and depicts the showman during one of his tours of France. Mora was a prolific illustrator whose work frequently appeared on the cover of Harpers, Colliers and Century magazines. In addition to this watercolor, which is in the collection at the Circus Art Museum in France, Mora's work can be found in the collections of The Smithsonian, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Canada.

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ever built in France, a structure that would accommodate 15,000 seats as well as 20,000 more standees. More men were being hired each day, and soon an army of 550 carpenters, excavators and engineers were at work on the site, preparing the showgrounds and open-air arena, along with a park designed around beautiful gardens and restaurants, and enough space for an encampment of 200 tents and teepees. The lower part of the grounds was designed as a pasture with stables for horses and enclosures for buffalo that would be used in the performance. In anticipation of the crowds, red concrete sidewalks were built, each one 25 feet wide, illuminated by powerful electric lights furnished by the Ball Electric Company of New York.



This attractive one-sheet lithograph promotes two performances in the western France town of Thouars in August 1905. It is among several designs printed by Chaix in Paris.

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The S.S. *Persian Monarch*: from New York to Le Havre

On Saturday April 27, 1889, the S.S. *Persian Monarch*, the same ship that had carried the show from England to New York the previous spring, left from New York Harbor for France. As the ship prepared to embark, the captain, R. J. W. Bristow, welcomed Cody and the troupe during a tremendous rainstorm that matted the manes of buffalo and soaked the Deadwood stagecoach as it was lashed to the deck.

The rain that accompanied the departure of the *Persian*

Monarch foreshadowed the worsening conditions that plagued the voyage. During the first few days of the crossing, the storm was so violent that the Indians on board began singing death songs. By the time the ship arrived in Le Havre, an 18-month Indian boy, along with two of the show's horses had died at sea.

The ship manifest, now in the authors' collection, included 12 staff members, six show girls (among them Annie Oakley and her rival Lillian Smith), and a 15 piece cowboy band led by William Sweeney. The passenger list also included 31 cowboys, 103 Indian braves, four squaws, five Sioux children, three Canadian trappers, seven Mexican vaqueros, 29 workers and an interpreter.

The arrival of the *Persian Monarch* was a news event itself. On the morning of Friday, May 10 press agent Crawford chartered two special "saloon coaches" to transport Paris

• BUFFALO BILLS WILD WEST.



The Forbes Company of Boston and New York printed many of the early posters for Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and thousands were shipped to France prior to the Paris opening in 1889. This particular one sheet shows cowboys on Texas Longhorns, an exotic scene in France nearly 130 years ago.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

newspaper reporters to Le Havre, along with special guest Leon Sari, the former director of the Folies-Bergère. Enroute to the harbor the press corps was treated to a sumptuous meal that included Moët & Chandon's driest Champagne.

In the days before wireless communication, the scheduled arrival of a transoceanic steamer was never guaranteed, and that was certainly the case with the *Persian Monarch*. For four days a small local steamer, the *Tourville* had been scanning the horizon, looking for signs of the ship, and now that Crawford and his guests had arrived at the harbor, the ship was seriously overdue. After hours of waiting, Crawford grew impatient and at 4:00 p.m. he and a cadre of reporters put out to sea on the *Tourville*. A short time later Nate Salisbury followed on a second vessel, the *L'Abeille*, accompanied by local administrative and health authorities.

For three hours, the boats traversed the harbor in anticipation of Buffalo Bill's arrival. Finally, at 7:00 p.m. smoke was spotted on the horizon. By 8:00 that evening, the *Persian*

Monarch and the *Tourville* were alongside each other.

Those on the *Tourville* described the other ship's deck as being crowded with Indians, cowboys, the band, and of course Cody with his long curly hair and his flowing trademark moustache. The Indians were wearing pants and long coats, their faces tanned and splashed with color. Some of them were described as wearing headdresses as they greeted the visitors with a guttural "Heloua! Heloua!" The welcoming committee responding with "Hip Hip Hip Hourra!" and it was not long until William Sweeney's cowboy band struck up *Yankee Doodle* followed by *La Marseillaise*. At that late hour, the tide was too low to enter the harbor, so the *Persian Monarch* dropped anchor off the coast. Because of sanitation and health concerns, only Nate Salisbury was allowed to board the ship that night.

Although Buffalo Bill, the passengers and crew would not be allowed to disembark until they had been inoculated against smallpox the next morning, it did not stop the promoters from holding a huge banquet marking the arrival of the Wild West at Le Havre's Frascati Hotel. The lavish dinner for reporters was also attended by local government officials along with the consuls of the United States and the United Kingdom.

The next morning 5,000 people crowded the wharf as



Eugène Pirou was well known for his portraits of celebrities, so it was no surprise that Buffalo Bill Cody would have his image captured at the photographer's studio shortly after arriving in Paris in May 1889.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

the *Persian Monarch* docked in "Bassin Bellot," in the second Le Havre inner harbor. After the necessary health inspections and vaccinations, Wild West company manager Major John Burke led the gaggle of reporters onto the ship, where one correspondent described the scene by saying, "the decks are crowded with strange, weird looking Indians of all sorts of hues, wrapped in queer-looking blankets."

The newspaper correspondents were taken below deck by Cody and Burke where they were shown the menagerie, which included a herd of 20 buffalo placidly ruminating in their stalls. Cody was quoted as telling the reporters, "They have been the best sailors of the whole lot, nothing seemed to upset them," adding that the horses also showed no fear during the crossing.

The reporters had a field day interviewing the cast of the show. John Nelson, driver of the Deadwood stagecoach, was married to one of the Indian princesses on the show, and he served as interpreter, introducing the proud, majestic

chiefs. The press also interviewed Annie Oakley, along with a few of the French-speaking Canadian trappers. One of them, Gabriel Dumont, was the focus of attention, as he had been a hero in the violent North-West rebellion against the Canadian government. After completing their interviews, Cody hosted the reporters for an enjoyable lunch where he entertained them with humorous stories prior to their trip back to Paris.

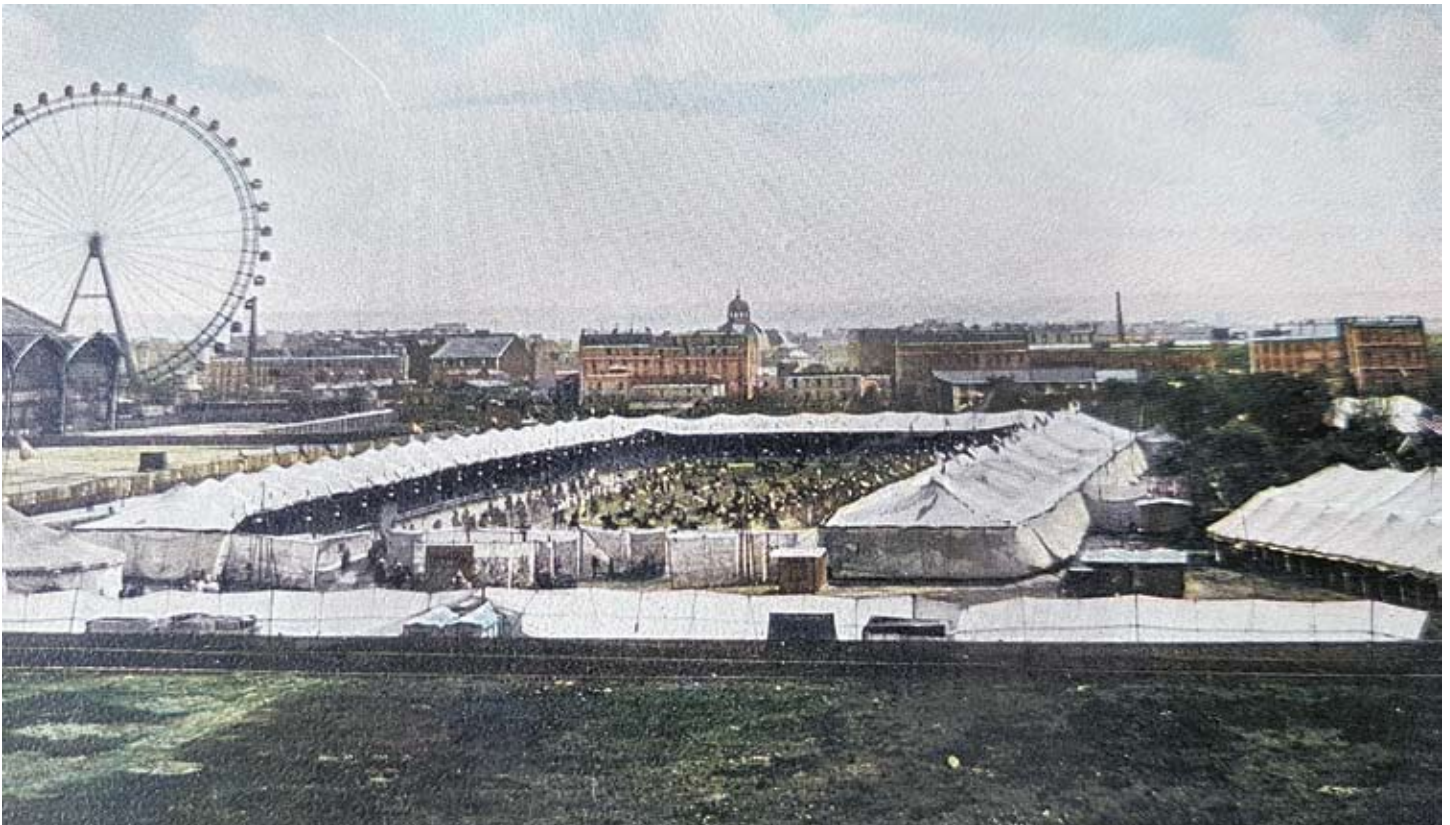
Saturday was spent unloading the ship, and preparing two trains for the trip to Paris. One of the trains was loaded with animals, equipment and baggage, while the other carried the show's performers and administrative staff. By 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, crowds of Parisians had assembled at Les Batignolles station, and they were not disappointed as cowboys and Indians disembarked from the coaches. The Paris correspondent for the *New York Herald* reported that "a wonderful cavalcade proceeded up the Route de la Révolte," describing how the Indians boarded three large carriages and cowboys and cowgirls rode horses through the city. The report also discussed how the buffalo were driven through the streets, and made mention of how one of them started to run on its own account, only to be quickly lassoed. While the performers and animals made their way to the Neuilly showgrounds, Colonel Cody checked into the Balzac Hotel where he spent a few days with friends as the lot was prepared.

As Cody, along with his cast and crew, began exploring the city, they were no doubt gratified to see the huge eight and 16-sheet posters that had been plastered on the walls of Paris. The lithographs were emblazoned with the old scout's portrait, and supplemented by gigantic 32-sheet billboards commemorating the command performance for Queen Victoria in 1887.

The Wild West in Paris

Prior to the show's Paris debut on Saturday May 18, the local press corps was invited by Colonel Cody to visit the show grounds so that the city's newspapers would be filled with stories in advance of the opening performance. The newspaper coverage was extensive as reporters described the great arena, fashioned on three sides from actual steel train rails, and on the fourth side a decorated canvas depicting Mexican plains with cardboard mountains in the foreground and a platform in the center of the arena where Frank Richmond would direct the performance.

The reporters described Indian warriors rehearsing a dance within a village of painted teepees arranged in a circle. Further across the showgrounds the cowboy tents faced the ladies' area, with Buffalo Bill and Nate Salisbury's private tents at the center of the encampment. Annie Oakley's tent was described as "cozy," and a photograph of her area shows her bicycle, clothing, books and an arrangement of beautiful flowers. Buffalo grazed freely in their enclosure and horses and mules were located in a large stable.



This colorized photo records the expansive Paris showgrounds where Buffalo Bill's Wild West exhibited in 1905. The show was set up on the Champ de Mars, a large public space located between the Eiffel Tower and the Galerie des Machines. To the left is the Grande Roue de Paris, a Ferris wheel that was an attraction in the area from 1900 until 1920.

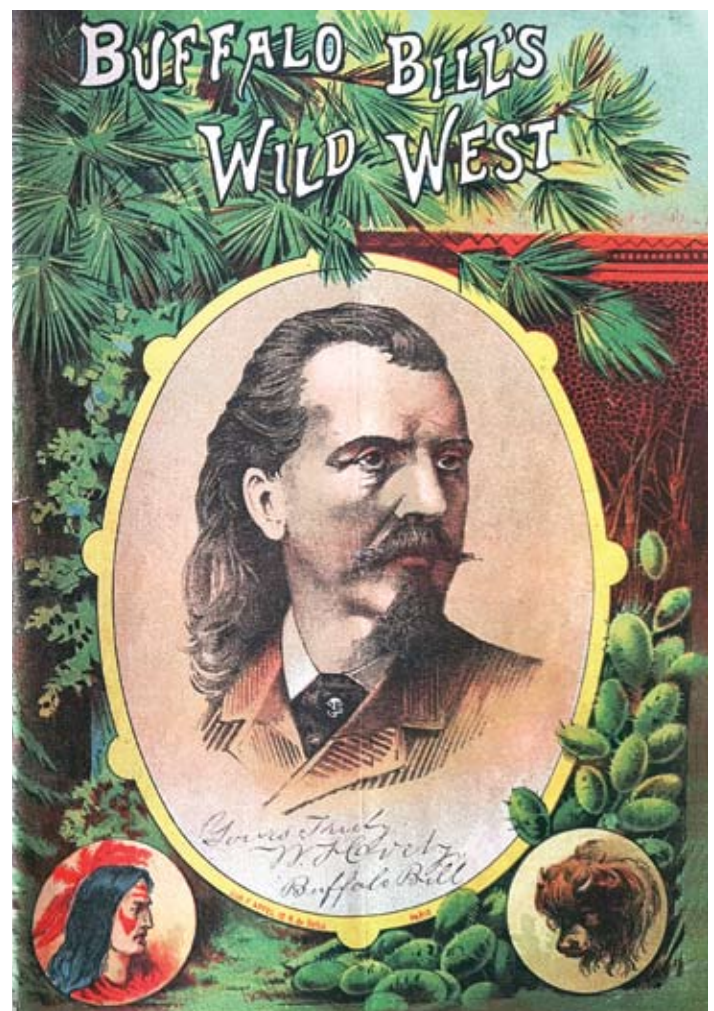
Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

Among those on hand for the inaugural performance were French President Marie Francois Sadi Carnot and his wife Cecile. They were accompanied by a "Who's Who" of French society, including several state ministers, the mayor of Neuilly, Queen Isabella II of Spain, and the Queen of Siam. Dignitaries and diplomats from the United States were also invited, along with all American citizens living in Paris.

The long-awaited Wild West performance began with a great parade featuring all of the cowboys, Indians, Mexicans, Canadian trappers and Colonel Cody himself, who rode into the arena escorted by the cowboy band. Following the grand entry, "Little Miss Sure Shot," Annie Oakley entered the arena where she amazed the spectators with her sharp shooting, shattering each of the blue glass balls thrown into the air. Her exhibition of marksmanship was followed by a column of trappers being attacked by Indians, segueing into a group of cowboys lassoing loose horses and a race around the arena by the cowgirls.

William Cody was 43 years old when his Wild West arrived in Paris. This 1889 program cover depicts the scout in his prime.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg





Native Americans in full Indian regalia attracted the attention of even the most blasé of Parisians when walking the city's streets in the spring of 1905.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

The next feature was the entry of the famous Deadwood stagecoach drawn by six mules. The coach was attacked by Indians and repelled by the cowboys who rescued the passengers. According to contemporary accounts, the audience enthusiastically applauded the setting of the Indian camp, along with the dances they provided and the fights they had with the cowboys. The Indians then attacked a settler's farm, and the program concluded with a grand finale featuring all of the actors in the show.

Over the next several months, two daily performances were given in Paris, an afternoon matinee followed by an evening show that was illuminated by electric lights. The least expensive ticket cost only one franc, while more well-heeled patrons could spend 45 francs for a comfortable eight-seat box. Following each performance, the audience was invited to tour the picturesque camp. Local accounts compared the tour of the camp to a real life experience from James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*.

The exotic nature of the performance was the talk of the town, but not everyone was enamored by the show. An exclusive boarding school, located across the street from the show grounds, prohibited the young girls who attended from looking at the cowboys or Indians, even ordering the

shutters on windows closed to limit the curiosity of the sheltered pupils.

The reaction at the private school was the exception rather than the rule, and throughout the extended Paris engagement Colonel Cody was a guest at the city's most exclusive salons where he was feted by high society, artists and intellectuals. Among those attending the Wild West were the great actress, Sarah Bernhardt, along with painters Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch and Rosa Bonheur.

Bonheur had first been introduced to Cody by her American art dealer, and during the Paris engagement the two became close friends. By the late 1880s Bonheur was established as one of the most important artists in the world, known for her great animal paintings, including her masterpiece *Le Marche' aux Chevaux* (The Horse Fair), which was purchased in 1887 by American railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt and gifted to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A longtime student of the American West, Bonheur was invited by Cody to visit the camp freely, and during the months the show was in Paris she was a regular in the backyard, painting horses and buffalo, along with Indians and cowboys. It was during this period that Bonheur painted a



Indian braves are seen prior to entering the arena in Paris in 1905.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

portrait of the Colonel astride a white horse, an image that was commemorated in a 1905 lithograph after the Wild West had returned to the United States. The original oil painting is now on display at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming.

The friendship between Buffalo Bill and the French artist included an exchange of gifts, with Cody giving her an Indian chief costume and Bonheur delivering two wild mustangs, "Apache" and "Clair de Lune" to the show. Although the horses were high spirited and difficult to break, it was not long before the cowboys had trained them and they were added to the performance.

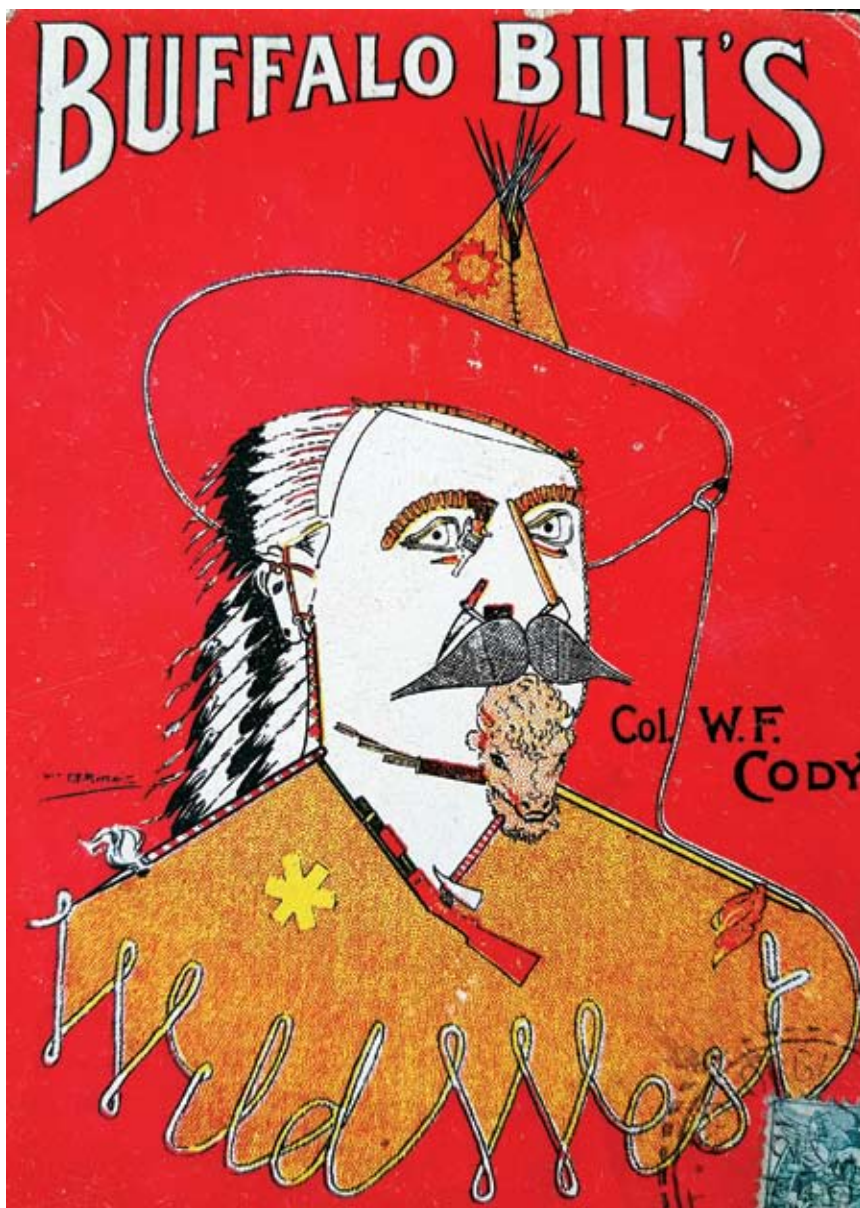
The 1889 exhibition of the Buffalo Bill Wild West was both a financial and critical success, as Parisians embraced the culture of the Old West and in doing so shaped European imagination of American life. It was not unusual for the locals to encounter Native Americans walking the streets, sitting and drinking outside a café, visiting the Eiffel Tower or listening to Edison phonographs in the Gallerie des Machines. Trinkets associated with the Wild West were snapped up, with souvenirs such as moccasins, children's masks, bows and carte de visite photographs making their ways to homes throughout Paris and beyond.

The Continent and Home

In October 1889, the Wild West was still in Paris, but performances were limited to 3:00 p.m. matinees. As temperatures started to cool the show closed out its Paris engagement on November 14, moving to the South of France in hopes of finding more moderate temperatures. Performances were presented in Mâcon, Lyon, Saint-Etienne, Valence, Arles and the final performances in France in Marseille.

From France the trains moved into Spain, where the show spent five weeks in Barcelona during the winter of 1889-90. The time in Spain was a low point of the tour, in great measure due to the spread of influenza and other diseases among the company. Several members of the cast died during that leg of the tour including announcer Frank Richmond.

By early March 1890, the Wild West was in Rome, setting up not far from the Vatican. While in Rome Buffalo Bill and a number of members of his troupe, including a group of Indians, were granted an audience with Pope Leon XIII. The tour of Italy put the show back in stride, as evidence by a letter Cody wrote to his doctor from the Naples Grand Hotel, "We have not lost a day this winter, only when moving. This has been the trip of my life."



A close observer will see many of the accoutrements associated with the Wild West in this whimsical portrait of Colonel Cody.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

From Italy, the show moved to Austria and Germany, a stretch of performances that included 18 sold out days in Munich prior to closing out the 1890 season in Strasbourg on October 27. While the cowboys and livestock remained in the German territory of Alsace, Cody returned to the United States along with other members of the company and the Indians, who stated upon their arrival that they had been treated well, paid and enjoyed their travel.

Shortly after returning to America, Cody was encouraged by his old friend General Nelson Miles to meet with Sitting Bull, one of the leaders of Ghost Dance movement, a prophecy that predicted an end to white expansion while preaching the goals of clean living and cultural cooperation by various tribes. The meeting was canceled by President Benjamin Harrison after he was advised that the Ghost Dance was a ritual that was often held before a battle was to

occur. During a standoff with thousands of U.S. Army troops, Sitting Bull was arrested when he refused to stop the Ghost Dance. In the ensuing melee, the chief was shot and killed and a number of Indian leaders were taken into custody.

As this was happening, Nate Salisbury was planning for a new tour in 1891 which would no longer include Native Americans, but rather an international group of cowboys and equestrians, that would become the "Congress of Rough Riders of the World." Still, Cody was adamant about including Indians in his performance, and after paying a \$20,000 security bond, he was allowed to take 28 of the Ghost Dance prisoners to Europe, including Short Bull, Kicking Bear, Lone Bull and 60 members of their families.

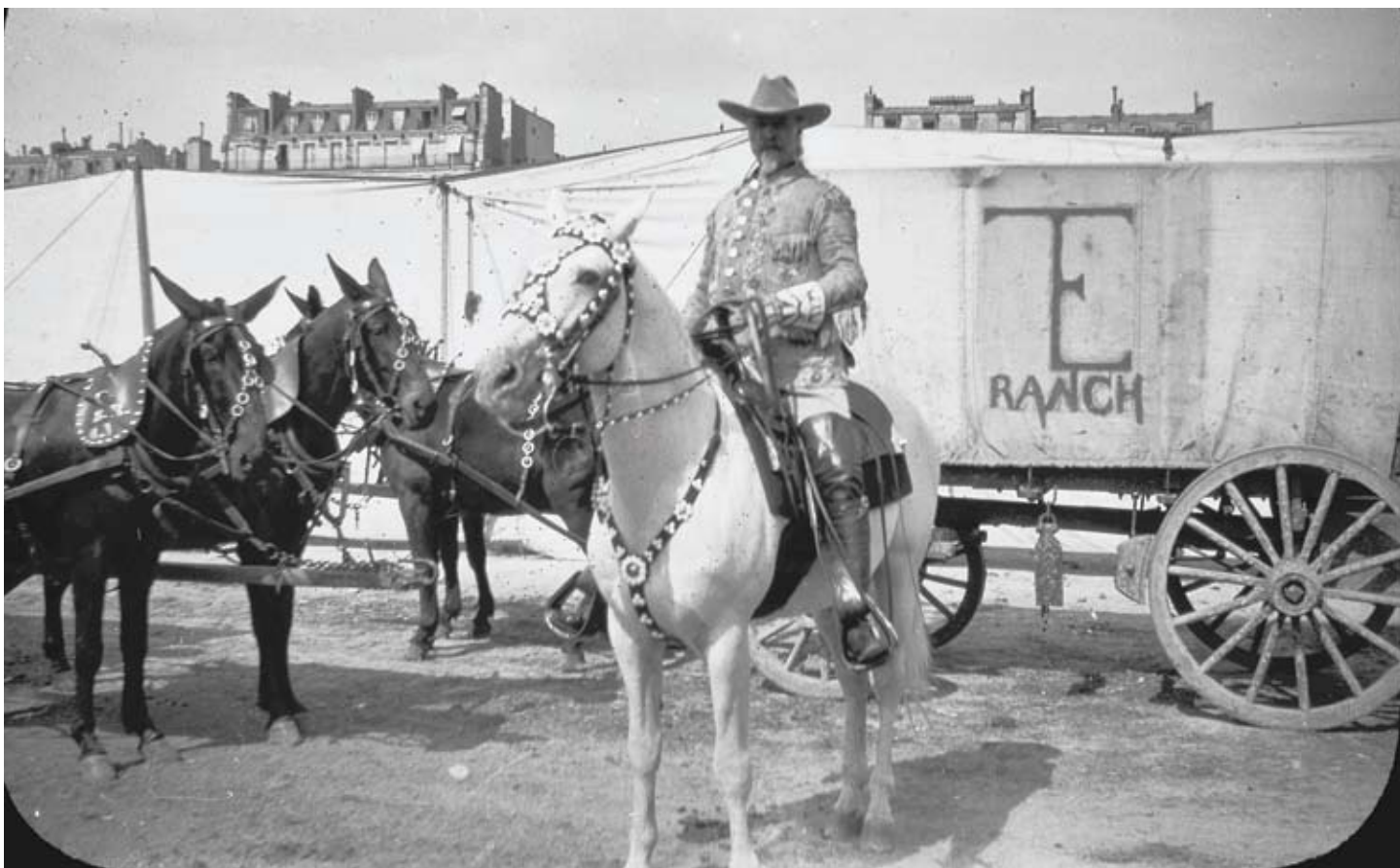
On April 16, 1891, Cody again opened in Europe, this time at the Place LeNôtre in Strasbourg. The headliners on the show that season included Annie Oakley in rifle competition with Lillian Smith, and the great marksman Johnny Baker. Again, the tour was a success.

It is here that we would like to acknowledge the contributions of Jules Lorin, a Frenchman who lived in Bois-Colombes, near Paris. Lorin was an Indian interpreter who had lived for several years in the United States with the Oglagas Sioux and had worked with General Miles at Fort Sheridan. The authors' collection includes correspondence to Lorin from General Miles, Nate Salisbury and Cody, as well as employment documents. Jules Lorin was an important figure in the European tour of the Buffalo Bill Wild West. He was also an associate of Michael Knoedler, the American agent for artist Rosa Bonheur.

Part II – Second and Farewell Tour – 1905-06

Cody and Bailey Join Forces

In 1893, Cody and Salisbury were certain they would continue the success they had seen at Expositions in England and France when they leased a lot adjacent to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The program that season was billed under its new name, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World." Because of the European tour, the Wild West had not toured extensively in the United States for several years. The Chicago World's Fair was a huge success and the Wild West profits were estimated to be \$1,000,000 (approximately \$25 million today).



Above, when Buffalo Bill was not traveling, he made his home at the "TE Ranch," 8,000 acres of open-range southwest of Cody, Wyoming. He owned the ranch from 1895 until his death in 1917. This print is from a glass slide taken on the Paris showgrounds in 1905.

Below, the Congress of Rough Riders of the World is captured in action during the 1905 Paris engagement.

both photos Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg





During the 1905 engagement in Paris, the Wild West maintained a large office in central Paris, at the corner of Rue Saint-Dominique and Avenue La Bourdonnais.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

Unfortunately, Salisbury, the businessman behind Buffalo Bill's success, became ill in 1894, and Cody was forced to find another partner. James A. Bailey was the perfect candidate. With Bailey's involvement, many new features and innovations were added, including one-day stands and side shows. As a result, by the late 1890s Buffalo Bill was as well-known as any single entertainer in the United States.

From 1898 until 1902 Barnum & Bailey toured Europe, with much of the same success that Cody had seen a decade before, and as the circus was wrapping up its overseas odyssey in 1902, Bailey and Cody prepared for another European tour of the Wild West. Routes were planned and advertising was purchased as the circus train that remained in Europe was repainted white with the title *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* replacing *Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth*, all of this in preparation for the performers and animals that arrived in Dunkirk on the S.S. *Michigan* on March 11, 1905.

As soon as the *Michigan* docked, the unloading began. Horses and a group of cowboys were first off the ship. In total, 225 people, 476 horses (including 50 wild ones) and 61 wagons were unloaded. During the week that the show was assembling near the inner harbor, hundreds of curious people visited the stables, kitchen and restaurant that had been set up near the docks. On the night of Saturday March

11 the three show trains comprised of 59 cars left for Paris, two weeks before Cody and most of the featured performers arrived in France.

For the 1905 visit to Paris the show would be presented on the Champ de Mars, a large public space located between the Eiffel Tower and the Galerie des Machines. The building of the arena, along with the construction of the camp, were events in their own right, with observers commenting on the precision and calm atmosphere that unfolded on the public space. The first Paris performance took place on April 2 and for two months the show gave sold out performances with the engagement ending June 4.

In his wonderful book *Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, Charles Griffin, who served as a manager with the show, provided many details about the Paris lot:

"Our tented city was artistically arranged in national groups, on grassy lawns, with graveled walks, the tents being of the regulation kind used in army field life. The main pavilion was the largest ever used for a similar exhibition, with a seating capacity of 17,000, which was inadequate to accommodate the immense crowds at least twice during every week of our stay in Paris."



This group of performers from the 1905 Wild West is sight-seeing on the Seine on board the Bateaux Mouches, boats which have been a popular tourist attraction since 1867.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

Large offices for the show were located in downtown Paris, at the corner of Rue Saint-Dominique and Avenue La Bourbonnais. The windows of the building displayed a beautiful two-sheet lithograph of Colonel Cody on his favorite horse, a poster printed by Weiners and based on a painting by Rosa Bonheur. Next to it, there was another poster showing Cody sitting on a folding stool, with a cowboy controlling a horse behind him. It too was a Weiners company two-sheet, depicting Buffalo Bill as an old man, the caption reading "Col. W. F. Cody tel qu'il est aujourd'hui" (Col. W. F. Cody as he is today). The façade of the building read "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World" and "Bureaux de Publicité" (Advertising Offices).

Throughout Paris and its environs, walls were covered with marvelous posters. Most of them printed by Weiners of Austria, some by Enquirer of Cincinnati and still more from the Courier Litho. Company of Buffalo, New York. The most attractive, however, were those printed in France by the Chaix Co., formerly known as the Jules Chéret printing company. The authors know of twelve different Chaix posters, and another series of six vertical three-sheets, each displaying international riders: cowboy s of the prairie, Arabs, American Amazons, Cossacks, American cavalry, and French cavalry.

Prior to entering the arena, Parisians were treated to a side show featuring a variety of acts such as Miss Octavia, a snake charmer; little princess Nouma Hawa; giant Aaron Moore; Fred Walters, the blue man; Professor Griffin, necromancer and sword swallower; Giovanni with birds and monkeys; Professor Sackatto with his musical hares; Chinese acrobats; a monkey theatre; and Zelda the Magician; along with Egyptians and Syrians.

Inside the arena, the performance had changed considerably for the French audience that had seen the show 16 years earlier. Among the 24 acts, the new features were a grand review introducing the riders of the world, military exercises by veteran English cavalry, drills by the U.S. artillery, an exhibition by Cossacks, and the Devlin Zouaves. The performance also included reenactments of historical events such as "Custer's Last Stand" and the Battle of San Juan Hill, which included a detachment from Theodore Roosevelt's "Rough Riders."

Throughout the two-month engagement concerts by William Sweeney's cowboy band were offered each Sunday and on other special occasions playing French music from Jacques Offenbach, but just as during the 1889 tour, the novelties of Buffalo Bill's Wild West were not confined to the showgrounds. Those on the streets of Paris frequently en-



The cookhouse is seen in action on September 16, 1905 in the town of Laval, about 175 miles southwest of Paris. The markings on the two-wheel water cart identifies it as municipal property.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg



This postcard shows an enormous crowd, along with the sideshow, or "Representation Extra" in Le Creusot, August 16, 1905.

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Near the end of the 1905 tour of France, the Wild West spent three days in Toulouse. In addition to promoting the show times, the date tail promises "A Show without Rival Unique in the World."

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

rival.

Those attending the performances in France were offered a variety of souvenirs, including an 80-page program featuring an illustration of Cody astride his horse, flanked by both American and French flags and focusing on the theme "Entente Cordiale," (Cordial Agreement). Other souvenirs included the red and gold book *Le Dernier des Grands Eclaireurs*, (The Last of the Great Scouts), along with postcards and other collectibles.

In his book *Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, Charles Griffin relates several anecdotes that occurred on the tour. On June 15 and 16, in Rouen, the show grounds was on the

Champ de Mars:

"It is an interesting old world city of 116,000 inhabitants. I took some snapshots here of the great Cathedral, 1,100 years old, and the swinging bridge across the River Seine which is a great architectural curiosity. The giant clock which is carved in stone over an arch in the Rue du Gros Horloge is another mechanical oddity built in the 18th century."

On July 4, America's Independence Day was celebrated in Lille:

"The encampment was gorgeously decorated in tri-colored bunting, a grand banquet was served to the members of the company. The bands played patriotic airs, and Colonel Cody made one of his characteristic speeches, in which he eulogized the French nation for the important part they had played in American history. James A. Bailey, the little Napoleon of show business, and his able lieutenant, George O. Starr, were visitors. This was the last time we saw Mr. Bailey alive."

In addition, Griffin wrote of a devastating storm that struck in late summer, "We had some terrific storms during the season, but the most severe of all struck us at Orleans, August 25th. It completely demolished the big tent."

The tour of France faced a crisis when, shortly after leaving Paris, several of the broncos contracted "glanders," a contagious and fatal disease. The national health officials decided the livestock had to be slaughtered, and by the time the season ended in Marseille, 300 horses had been killed. Although local stables had offered their own horses to the show they were not adequate, and when Cody returned to

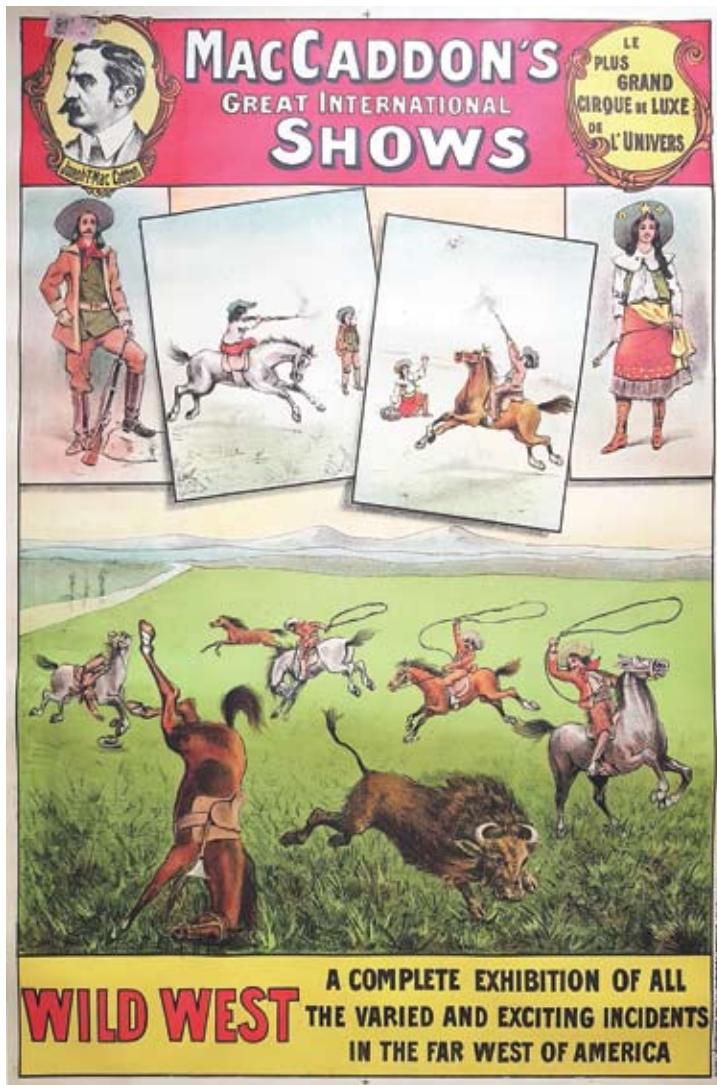
countered entire families of Native Americans, in cafes and even the bateau-mouche tour boats that traversed the Seine River.

Paris was again a total success, the memory of which was captured by a number of French artists including the great post-Impressionist painter Maximilien Luce who depicted Indians and cowboys of the show on marvelous oils on panels that he created in 1906.

French Tour and Winter Quarters in Marseille

After the final Paris performances, Buffalo Bill's Wild West began a tour that would take its trains across France from June 5 through November 12. During the summer and fall of 1905 Buffalo Bill visited 114 cities and towns, giving performances each day at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Most of the tour consisted of one-day stands, with exceptions being four days in Lille, three days in Reims, ten days in Lyon and eleven in Bordeaux. Even though Cody traveled in a luxurious private car, at each town he would stand in the rail yards, observing the unloading along with his staff.

Several months prior to the show's arrival, every city mayor was contacted by the Buffalo Bill staff who worked with local leaders to find and lease an appropriate show-grounds. Once the location and date were secured, press agents and billposters arrived by rail, covering walls and windows with colorful lithographs. The advance was led by Major John Burke, a Cody associate for 30 years. It was Burke who worked as Press Agent, planting feature stories and buying advertising in local newspapers. For each location a full-color courier with the city's name, date and show times was circulated in the days leading up to the show's ar-



This rare lithograph for MacCaddon's Great International Shows depicts scenes associated with Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Joseph T. MacCaddon was James A. Bailey's brother-in-law, and after a quarrel, MacCaddon opened his own circus to compete, unsuccessfully, with the Wild West during its 1905 tour of France.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

the United States for the winter, he was able to make arrangements with James A. Bailey to import new steeds for the 1906 season.

After wintering near Marseille, the new season began in that city on March 4 with a two-day stand, followed by engagements in Toulon, Draguignan and a four-day stand in Nice. From Nice the show crossed the border into Italy, beginning a tour of that country in Genoa.

The French route of 1905-06 covered a distance of 5,814 miles, and no doubt exposed many in the company to sights and experiences that were new and intriguing. It was in the middle of the tour in town of Elbeuf on June 14 that Cody wrote of his spiritual beliefs in a letter to his sister Julia, stating, "It is in my old age that I found God, and I realize how easy it is to serve him."

Part III – Buffalo Bill's Competitors and Imitators

On August 7, 1905, as the Buffalo Bill Wild West was in the final days of its tour of France, the Business Tribunal in the French town of Grenoble adjudicated the bankruptcy of MacCaddon's Great International Shows. The authors are in possession of a letter from Joseph T. MacCaddon, to his worrying wife at a time when the American circus was faltering. The July 14 letter replies to her suggestion that he should not work on Sundays, the Lord's Day. He writes from Ville franche-sur-Saône:

"My little Christian...I know that some people attribute acts to me that if I had committed them would not have left me with honor...I shall continue on my own clean way and trust to a higher court for judgement...Don't worry about the Sunday show.

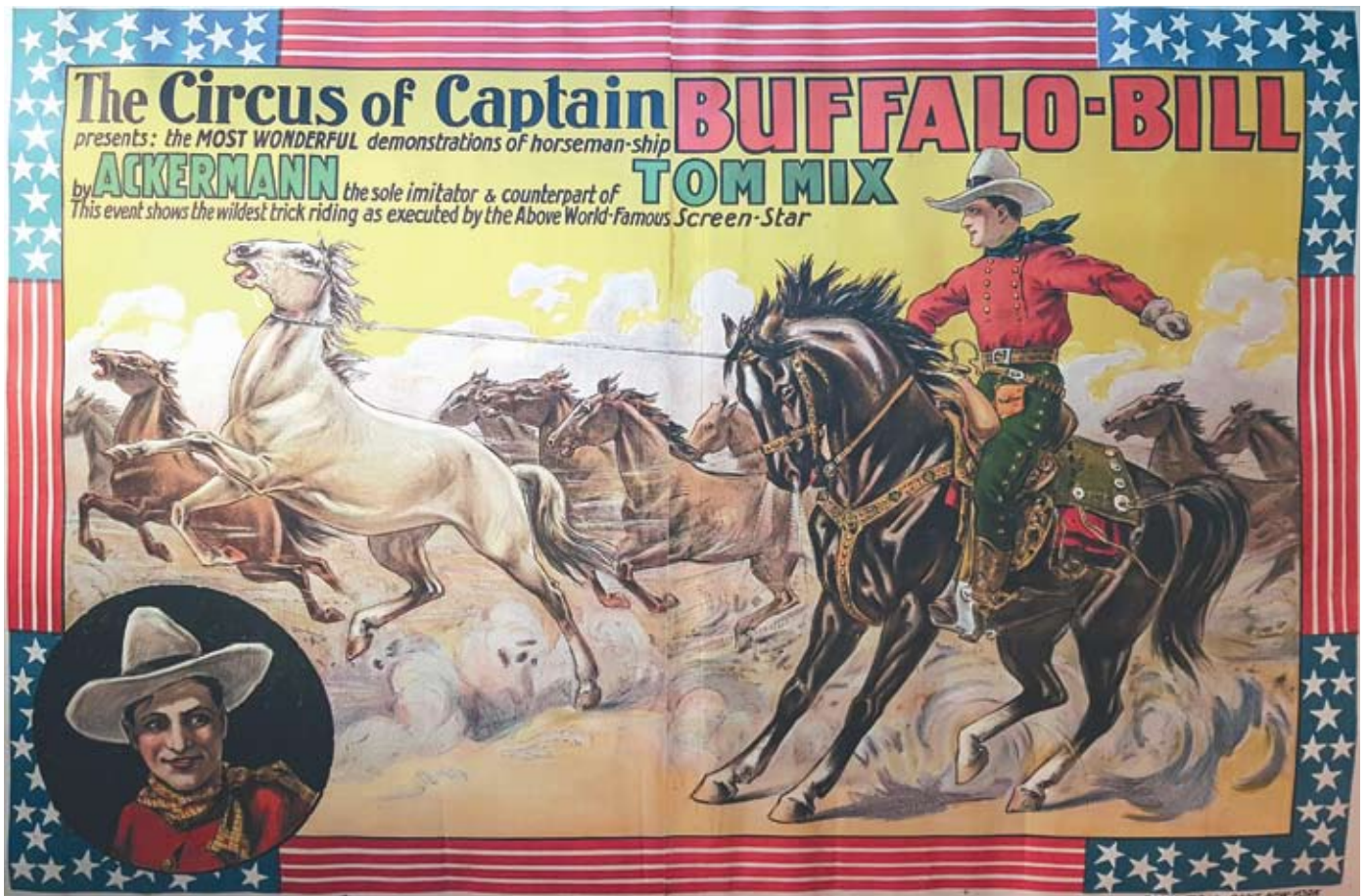
"I got splendid letters from the mayor of each town and occasionally from the Prefect inviting us to return...It is gratifying but I cannot use them to help business...Devoted love from Joe."

MacCaddon was James A. Bailey's brother-in-law and had been the manager of Barnum & Bailey during the 1902 tour of France. After quarreling with Bailey in 1904, MacCaddon decided to create his own huge circus to tour Europe, appearing at the same places where Barnum & Bailey had made considerable money, especially in France. In February 1905, he sent letters to the officials of many French cities in hopes of renting show grounds with the expectation of creating an enormous show, even bigger than *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

MacCaddon's Short-Lived Circus

The MacCaddon advance team left New York on the S.S. *Philadelphia* on March 4 landing in Cherbourg on April 19. MacCaddon's Great International Shows opened a six-day stand in Lille, traveling to Rouen as a 70-car rail show moving in four sections. The new show was enormous and the lithographs printed by Charles Verneau in Paris were exceptional. The performance itself ran for three hours.

Whether it was by design or coincidence, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, now owned in part by MacCaddon's estranged brother-in-law James A. Bailey, was beginning its tour of France at exactly the same time. In addition to traditional circus acts, MacCaddon's show included cowboys and Indians in his performance, among them a featured performer known as "Buckskin Bill, the Buffalo Hunter." When Cody wrote Bailey to advise him of this, Bailey was furious. The authors' collection includes a telegram from Cody to the mayor of Nevers, sent in July to confirm performances on August 17. The telegram asks if the MacCaddon circus will be appearing in Nevers prior to the Wild West. In another telegram, Cody suggests that Bailey and MacCaddon meet



Tom Mix was an international film star during the 1920s, and circus owner Sampson Bouglione exploited his popularity by engaging a cowboy identified as "the sole imitator and counterpart," of the American actor. Although the poster was created by the Paris firm of Bedos and Co., and used during *The Circus of Captain Buffalo-Bill's* tour of France, the description on the lithograph is in English.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

to negotiate a peace. Bailey replied on May 15 rejecting any attempt to offer an olive branch, and encouraging Cody to continue the fight. As a result of the battle, some Buffalo Bill posters and newspaper advertisements were created with the text, "There is only one Buffalo Bill. There is only one Colonel Cody. There is only one Wild West."

During the first two months of the tour, MacCaddon was fairly successful as his circus was routed through the North and East of France, but when the circus arrived in the nation's heartland that summer the competition intensified and the show was forced to spend huge sums in advertising. In Montluçon some MacCaddon workers, who had been fired a few days earlier, caused considerable trouble for the circus, disrupting the performance and forcing police and firefighters to stop the show and evacuate the big top.

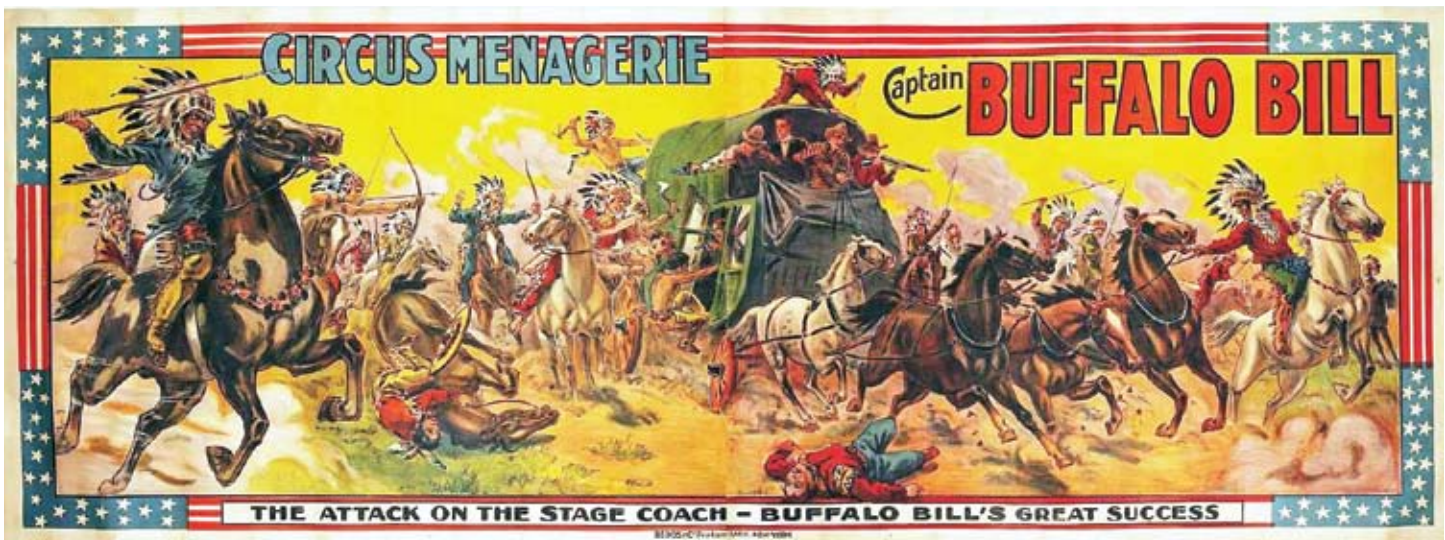
Trouble continued to follow the show and on June 25 in Vendôme, MacCaddon was forced to abandon his menagerie when the show left town. A few days later, on July 31, there was another fight between French and American working men, a situation that deteriorated when management decided not to pay employees. The *coup de grâce* occurred as the circus was enroute to Aix-les-Bains, Vizille, and the trains were forced to stop in Grenoble. At that point, MacCaddon abandoned his performers, animals and equipment and fled to Great Britain in hopes of avoiding French police.

Court documents show that the liabilities for the show were at 150,000 francs, and the performers were stranded. After learning of their plight, Colonel Cody and some of the Indians in his troupe raised the money necessary to book passage for MacCaddon's Native Americans so they could return to the United States.

After bankruptcy, the MacCaddon circus was sold at auction on September 7, with much of the equipment being purchased by other European shows. Colonel Cody also participated in the auction, and was high bidder on some of the material. The next day at 9:00 a.m. a group of 30 horses, eight ponies, four lions, a polar bear, a brown bear and four young elephants were purchased by Cirque Pinder for 12,000 francs. The two auctions generated only 65,000 francs, not even half of MacCaddon's bankruptcy debt. MacCaddon's Great International Shows is now remembered as the biggest American show to tour France for the shortest amount of time.

Samuel Franklin Cody

No story of Buffalo Bill in France would be complete without mention of Samuel Franklin Cody, an American who mimicked Buffalo Bill and used his own given name to launch a career as a copy-cat performer before becoming an inventor of a variety of flying machines and an early pioneer of manned flight.



In 1928, more than ten years after William Cody's death, French showman Sampion Bouglione had posters created for his circus featuring "Captain Buffalo Bill." The artwork capitalized on a scene of the American West associated with the show that had toured France more than two decades before.

Circus Art Museum J.Y. and G. Borg

In 1882, at the age of 21, Samuel Cody began his entertainment career traveling with Adam Forepaugh's Circus and Wild West Show where he was billed as "a sharp shooter, cowboy and pistol shot." Throughout his life, he maintained his resemblance to Buffalo Bill in order to build an audience and ultimately achieve some measure of success. In 1891, Buffalo Bill's Wild West unsuccessfully sued to prevent him from identifying himself as "Son of Buffalo Bill" and using the title "Wild West Show" in his advertising.

One of the stunts that generated significant press for Samuel F. Cody occurred on bicycle racetrack, the Vélodrome Buffalo in Levallois-Perret on November 11, 1893. The race took place on the same show grounds where Buffalo Bill had performed in 1889, and featured a competition between Samuel Cody and the then-velocipede champion.

Stade Captain Buffalo Bill-Bouglione

The final legacy of Buffalo Bill's European tours began in Paris with circus performances that were successful because of Cody's continuing popularity with French audiences, years after his death. In the years immediately following the First World War, Joseph "Sampion" Bouglione, Senior began his entertainment career as the owner of a menagerie that was presented at local fairs. Bouglione, assisted by his four sons, soon developed a lion act. In 1924, he partnered with the Périé Circus and began building his reputation as an excellent performer.

In 1926, Bouglione was given the opportunity to purchase a large cache of unused lithographs from the 1905 tour of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Bouglione's acquisition of the posters from Marcel, another animal trainer, encouraged him to launch an American-style show under a large big top. Within a few months, he was advertising his circus at Belfort Stadium using the splendid posters that had been printed

for Buffalo Bill more than 20 years before. Although Cody had died in 1917, audiences were led to believe they would be seeing Buffalo Bill and his show.

While the performance presented was neither a wild west show nor did it feature Colonel Cody, it was well received. It was not long before the Bouglione family generated enough revenue to allow for the purchase the necessary horses, wagons and tents to frame a large circus, and present it at the Porte Champerret in Paris during the winter of 1928-1929.

The new circus was a hit, but the original supply of Buffalo Bill posters quickly became exhausted. With success at the ticket wagon and the money to create lithographs of his own, Sampion Bouglione ordered a series of new posters designed by Antonin Magne of the Bedos Poster Company.

The authors have assembled one of the most extensive collections of these posters as well as the original Magne artwork. Among the rare pieces is a lithograph which reads, "Stade Captain Buffalo Bill presents the most wonderful demonstration of horsemanship by Ackermann, the sole imitator and counterpart of Tom Mix, by Bedos and Co. Printed Paris and New York." Another poster reads in English, "Circus Menagerie. Captain Buffalo Bill: The attack of the stage coach - Buffalo Bill's great success." An amazing detail is the stagecoach design, as it is not a depiction of an American stagecoach, but rather a French horse-drawn omnibus!

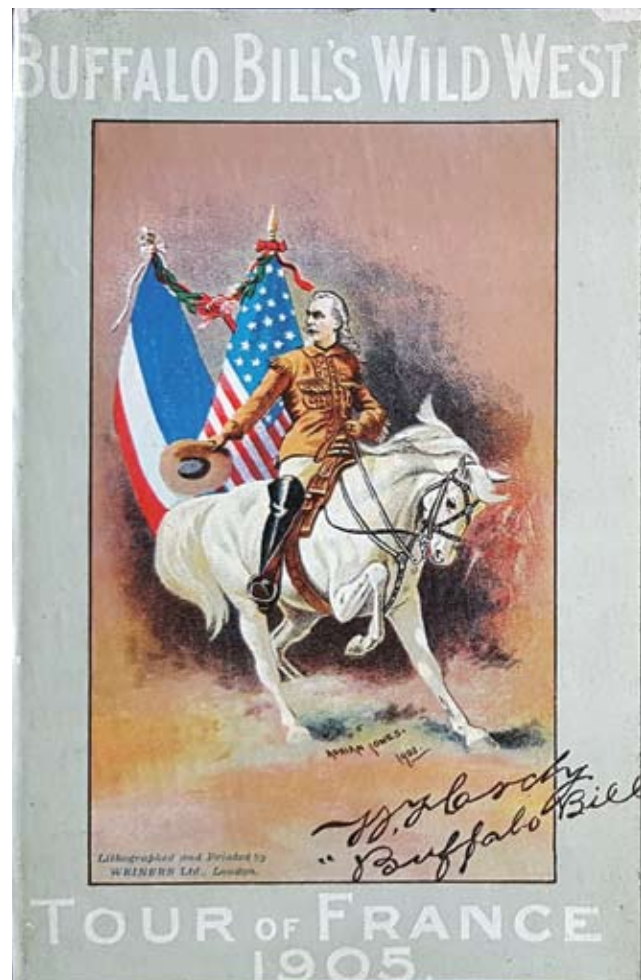
Although Buffalo Bill had been dead for a decade, the illusion was perfect and the public was delighted. After great success in Paris, the big show toured France and Belgium on Renault trucks, changing its name to Cirque International in 1930. Four years later, the Bouglione family purchased the Cirque d'Hiver, moving to the permanent structure in Paris, and beginning a legacy of performances that continues to-

day, made possible in part through the reputation of Colonel William F. Cody – and a stack of his forgotten posters. **Bw**

The authors would like to acknowledge Jean-Louis Ropers for his linguistic assistance in preparing this article.

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At the conclusion of the 1905 season, a route book was issued featuring cover artwork by Adrian Jones. It was printed by Weiners Ltd. in London.

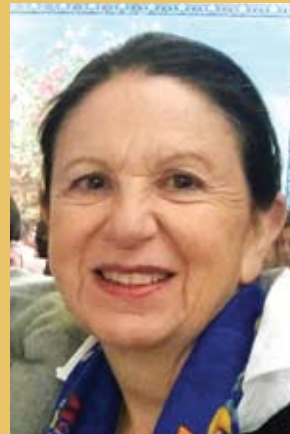
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about the authors...

Dr. Gérard Borg is a Medical Laureate at the University of Rouen in France with two passions in life. As a general practitioner, he carefully cares for his patients, while at the same time he is devoted to the Circus Art Museum which he founded and assembled while researching the relationship between circus and art. Dr. Borg's quest has taken him around the world and during these travels he has assembled one of the largest private circus collections and libraries in Europe. An expert on circus posters and paintings, Dr. Borg frequently collaborates with well-known institutions such as the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Centre National du Costume de Scene, and the Normandy



Museums. Dr. Borg has been a member of the Circus Historical Society since 1976. He makes his home in Normandy, France.



Dr. Jeanne-Yvonne Borg was the head of the Hemostasis unit of Rouen University Hospital where she created a comprehensive care unit for hemophiliacs. She is a specialist in hematology and holds a Ph.D. in Human Biology from Paris VII University. Dr. Borg is renowned for her medical research at Cambridge University in

England, and her discovery of the unusual proteins "Antithrombins Rouen." She also specializes in Japanese woodblock prints and poster history. Dr. Borg loves circuses and is a collaborator at the Circus Art Museum.



Posters of Bertram Mills Circus

by Steven B. Richley

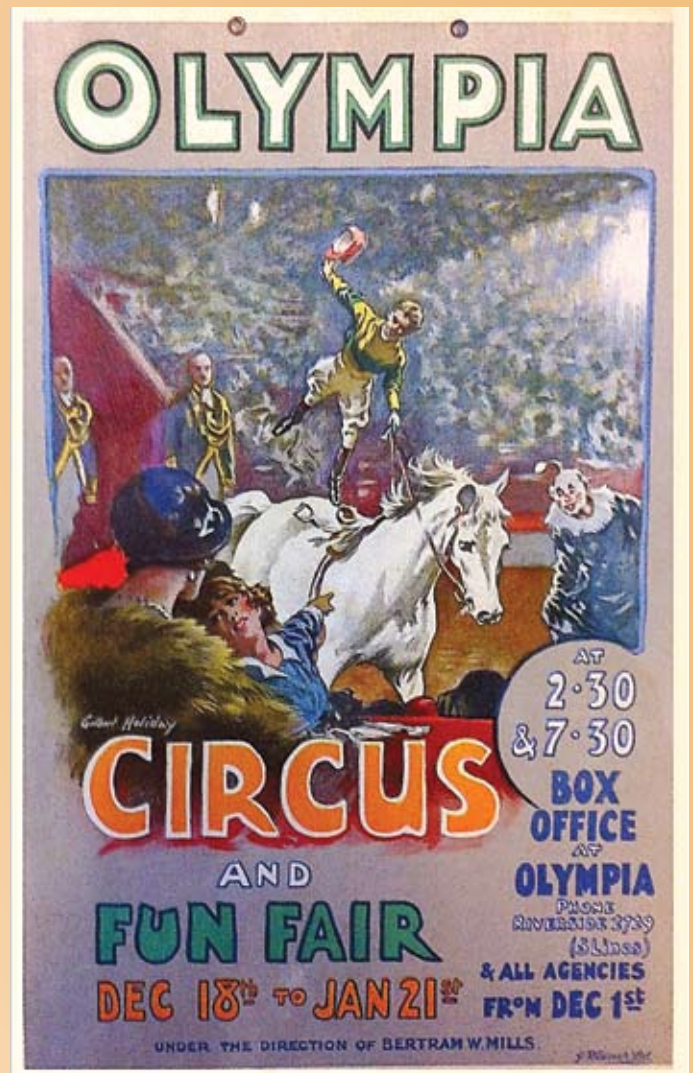
Britain's Bertram Mills Circus (1920-1967) was a national institution revered by a general public, the great and good of the land, and by circus performers around the world who dubbed it "the Blue Ribbon Circus of the World." To the public it was known as "The Quality Show," Britain's most lauded and splendid circus of all time. Bertram Mills presented annual winter shows at Olympia – a large exhibition

hall in West London – every year from 1920/21 to 1966/67 (except during the War years when Olympia was used as an army supplies distribution centre). It tented the length and breadth of Great Britain and Ireland from 1930 on until rising transportation costs, particularly those associated with its circus train, forced it to cease touring after the 1964 season.



Poster 1

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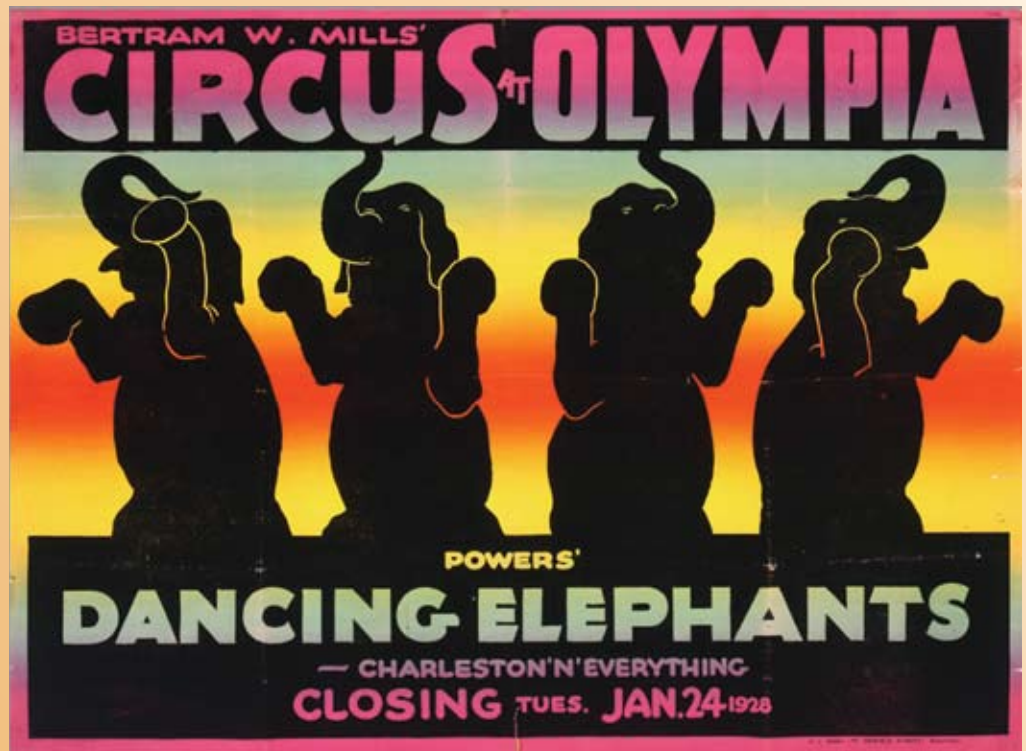


Poster 2

Steven B. Richley Collection

Then, as now, the main publicity tool of British circuses was the poster. Even after the advent of television and the internet, the show bill has been the most identifiable form of advertising for circuses since the modern circus was created 250 years ago (1768) by Philip Astley in London.

Bertram Mills used an amazing quantity of posters. In 1960 alone, Bertram Mills Circus on tour played in 42 towns and cities, and used over 60,000 posters of varying sizes for these dates. Twenty percent of the company's total expenditures was spent on poster and newspaper advertising. Prior to World War II, to advertise the Olympia shows, Mills would issue full-color, highly illustrated posters showing most of



Poster 4

Steven B. Richley Collection



Poster 3

Steven B. Richley Collection

its 20-plus attractions. This fact will help readers to comprehend the large numbers of poster designs produced for this one circus between 1920 and 1967.

By the mid-1920s, all of Bertram Mills' poster printing (and subsequently those of all major British shows) was carried out by the firm of W. E. Berry of Bradford, Yorkshire. For travelling circuses, W. E. Berry had to give a special service, as touring shows demanded posters with a blank panel into which could be overprinted the tour details for each individual town or city. Berry held a huge stock of posters, and upon instruction from the publicity manager of the circus would quickly overprint the necessary information, often with very short notice, in order to deliver the poster stock to the circus advance unit. With major circuses utilising between 1,500 and 3,000 posters per town, and W. E. Berry servicing up to a dozen circuses, the company needed and had a remarkable staff trained in this particularly challenging form of printing.

In the early years, when Bertram W. Mills was alive and mixing in aristocratic circles, he had his own poster and program designs created for his show, often by very notable painters and illustrators. The name Dudley Hardy is, perhaps, not readily recognized in connection with circus art, but he was the designer of the first two (1920/21 & 1921/22) program covers and the most recognised poster designs (Poster 1). Hardy was a very important English painter, illustrator, and caricaturist, exhibiting regularly at the Royal Academy. His graphic art was renowned, and his tenure coincided with the boom in illustrated magazines as well as poster use around the turn of the century. The influence of French graphic art style can be seen in his works, his fluent lines and in his use of tones. He was greatly influenced by the

French poster designer Jules Cheret, who was noted for theatre and circus designs.

John Morton-Sale designed the poster, program, and herald for the 1923 Olympia season. Morton-Sale, along with his wife Isobel, later completed extensive illustrative work for children's books including pieces for Peter Pan writer J. M. Barrie.

Gilbert Joseph Holiday was a leading artist whose works were closely identified with the horse world – horse racing, hunting, show jumping, coaching and polo. He became a personal friend of Bertram W. Mills, whose life was also associated with horses in the fields of showing, coaching, judging, funerals and with the circus from 1920 to his death in 1938. Holiday, born in London in 1879, was one of the most accomplished 20th century painters of the horse in action. He became an illustrator for *The Strand* and *Graphic* magazines, *The Tatler*, and *The Illustrated London News*. Lionel Edwards, who at one time shared a studio with Holiday and was himself a fine illustrator, commented that “No one can, or ever could, paint a horse in action better than Gilbert could.” Gilbert Holiday provided his first design for

the Mills' 1924/25 poster (**Poster 2**), an impression of the rider “Young Steve” (Tommy Baker), which was also used as a program design. Its color and depth of intensity makes it one of the finest early Mills designs.

The star attraction of the 1925/26 (6th) production of Bertram Mills Circus at Olympia was Captain Alfred Schneider with his 70 lions. Their arrival and appearance were accompanied by one of the greatest advertising campaigns ever staged by a circus. Initially posters declaring, “Look Out - Seventy are Coming!” were billed all over London to catch the public's attention. Later the words “to Olympia” and the illustration of a lion's head were added. The lions arrived by boat from Paris and were transported through the streets of London in 15 trailers displaying posters proclaiming “Seventy lions going to Olympia!” One poster featuring a roaring lion (**Poster 3**) gave more information on the staging of the spectacular act.

Hundreds of four-color (40" x 30") posters appeared all over London to advertise Mills' 8th circus at Olympia in 1927/28. All of the headline acts, from The Skating Ballet, Mabel Stark and her Parachute Horse, and Captain Wall -



Poster 5

Steven B. Richley Collection



Poster 6

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the Man who swims with Crocodiles, to Powers' Dancing Elephants (**Poster 4**) had a striking monochrome design printed on psychedelically colored paper.

After nine consecutive winter seasons at Olympia, Bertram Mills and his sons, Cyril and Bernard, decided to produce a touring version of their now famous circus. In 1929, they partnered with The Great Carmo, an Australian

illusionist, to tour The Great Carmo's Circus & Menagerie, prior to opening their own self-titled circus in 1930. With a star-studded line up including Leinert – The Man Shot from a Cannon (**Poster 5**), the show was an immediate success.

For the 1932/33 (13th) Olympia season, Mills featured German wild animal trainer Alfred Kaden with his group of ten lions, four tigers (**Poster 6**) and two Canadian black bears. Kaden and his brother Walter worked for Hagenbeck's, the wild animal dealers in Germany, Walter Kaden specialising in elephants.

The Four Vesses were one of the first acts to be featured in an art-deco style bill (**Poster 7**). It was a style that would be used frequently in Mills' posters throughout the 1930s for both individual attractions and general bills, as well as hanging cards like the striking design from the 1933/34 (14th) Olympia production (**Poster 8**).

From loop-the-looping bicycles and leaping motor cars to human torpedoes and fire divers, from "Giraffe-Necked Women" and plate-mouthed "Ubangi Savages" to leopard-skinned ladies and the man with the ostrich digestion, Ber-



Poster 7

Steven B. Richley Collection



Poster 8

Steven B. Richley Collection

tram Mills frequently featured amazing thrill acts and side show attractions alongside his circus at Olympia, particularly in the early, pre-war years. In addition to reviews and advertisements in the comprehensive programs, bespoke leaflets, postcards, and posters were often produced for the more interesting attractions.

Zaro Agha, "The Oldest Man in the World!," appeared in the side show at Olympia in 1931/32 and on touring shows for a number of years beginning in 1931 (**Poster 9**).

Following their success in America with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the "Giraffe-Necked Women" appeared in London for the 1934/35 Olympia Season prior to three consecutive tenting seasons from 1935 through 1937 (**Poster 10**). The "rings" were actually one continuous spring-like coil, worn by the women from the age of five years. The Kayan Tribe (Giraffe-Necked) women say that the purpose for wearing the rings is cultural identity associated with beauty.

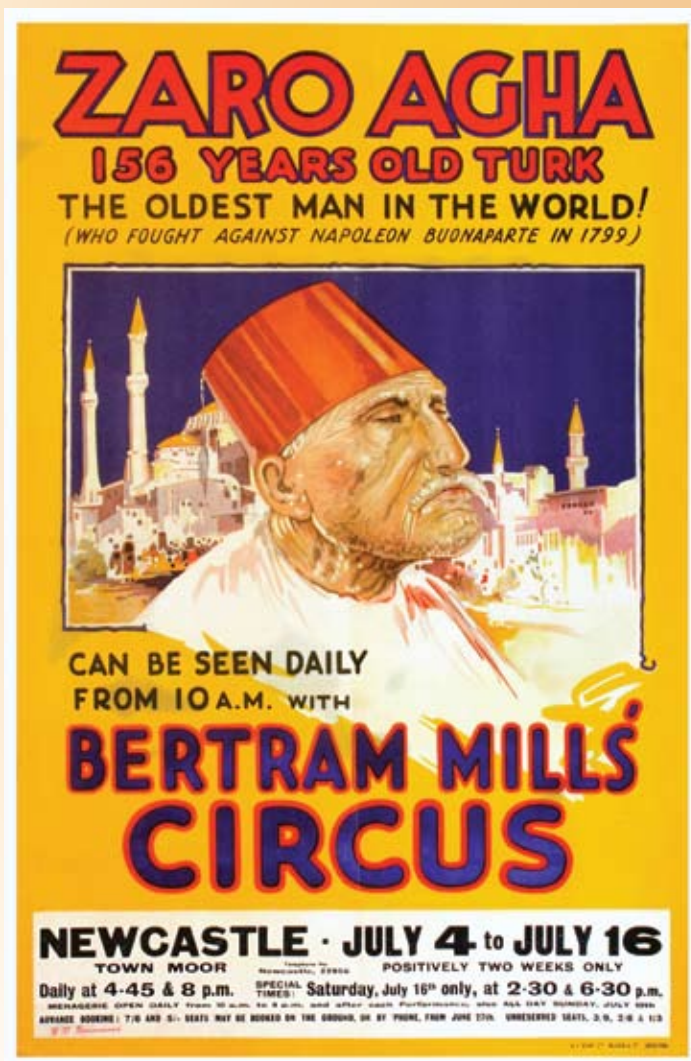
Following his 1924 poster design, three more of Gilbert Holiday's outstanding circus works graced the covers of Mills' London programs for the 1932/33, 1933/34 and

1934/35 winter seasons. His 1933/34 artwork was also used for a lithograph (**Poster 11**).

If Dudley Hardy and Gilbert Holiday provided Mills with some of its most memorable poster and program cover designs, Leon Crossley was undoubtedly the artist who contributed most to the extensive range of designs created for posters by W. E. Berry, Mills' printer. He created designs for the Bertram Mills Circus for well over 30 years and was probably initially a family friend of Bertram W. Mills, who lived nearby. Crossley was a fine painter, particularly of animals. Some of his enormous number of creations, particularly in the 1930s, can be classified as highly effective, none more so than the designs produced for the posters advertising the female fakir Koringa (**Poster 12**) who toured with Mills 1937-1939.

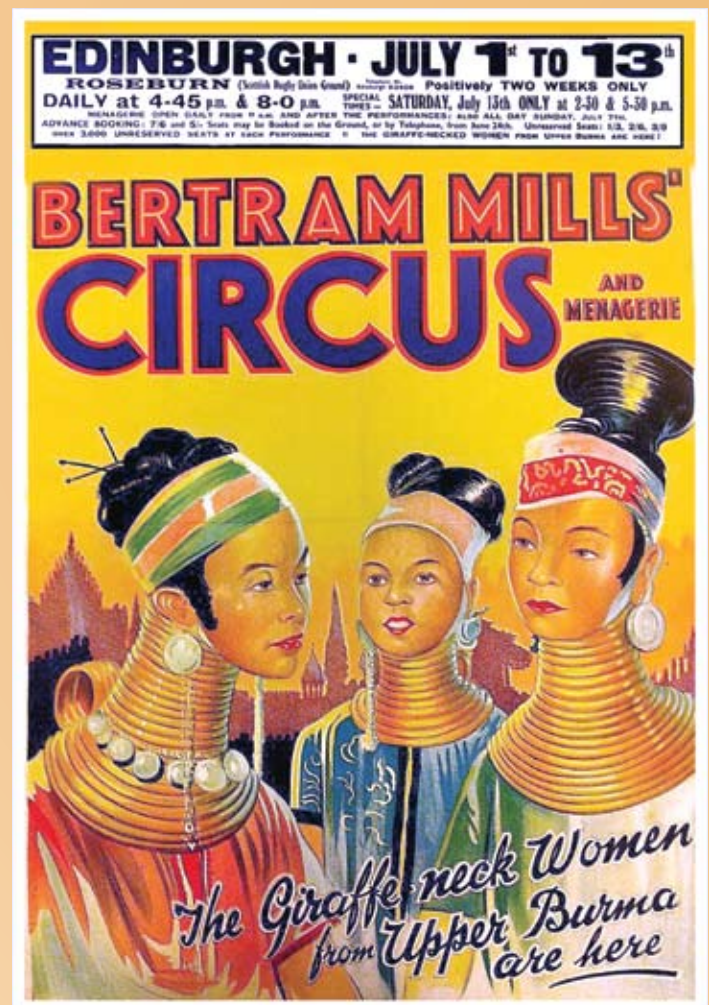
"The Grand Carrousel" of horses and ponies, which appeared for the first time at Olympia in 1933/34 and was presented on the 1934 tenting tour by Mills' in-house equine trainer, Czeslaw Mroczkowski, is seen in its impressive original format (**Poster 13**).

Wenzel Kossmayer (**Poster 14**) trained the High School act for Bertram Mills' 1935 (6th) tenting show. It was typical



Poster 9

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Poster 10

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of circuses at the time to have a high number of horse acts and Bertram Mills was no exception. Seven out of the 21 acts on that tour featured horses, both from England and the continent.

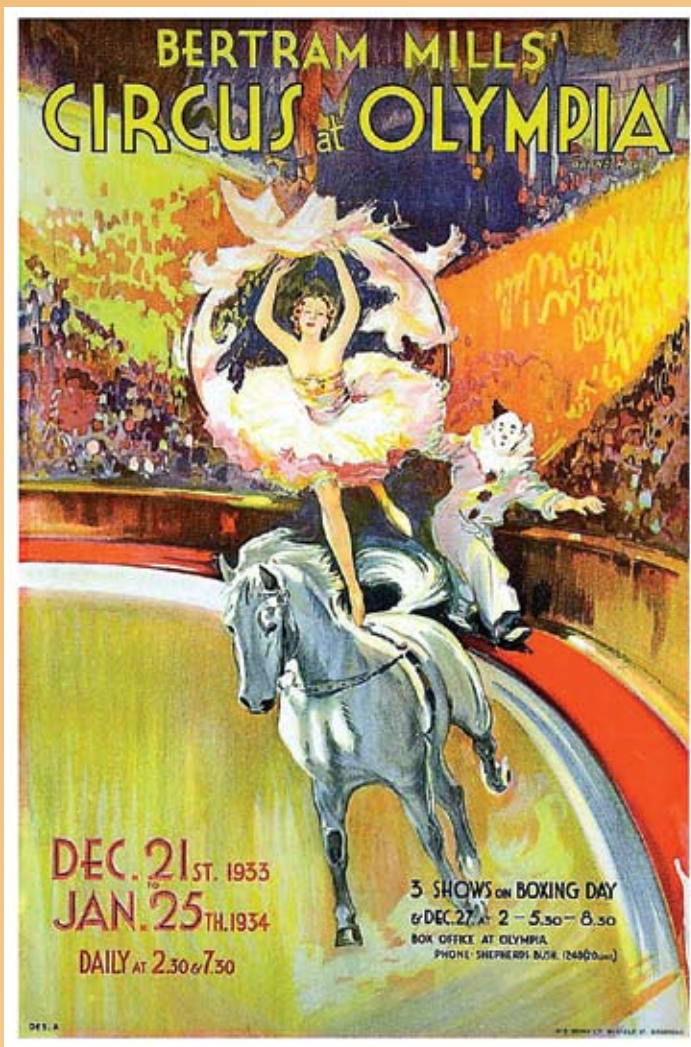
Shortly after this highly stylised design was used for posters and hanging cards (**Poster 15**) to advertise the 1952/53 Olympia shows, the design of Mills' posters changed considerably. Advertising agent Greenly Ltd. contributed more of a corporate image – especially in the style of lettering used on posters. Yellow lettering with a green shadow on a red or magenta background (**Poster 16**) was featured on bills for most of the 1950s with a change to an angular font for the 1960s (**Poster 17**).

The idea for the new look “Supershow” which toured for the 1964 (30th) tenting season (**Poster 18**), is said to have partly come from a trip by Mills' management to the rival Billy Smart's Circus that was presenting big spectacles, such as “The Arabian Nights Revue” and “Davy Crockett Cowboys and Indians.” Another influence could have been that it had been decided to tour Ireland again in 1965, and the Bertram Mills management wanted to provide a different,

revamped style of production to entice Irish citizens, many having seen the show when it last toured there in 1961. The performance consisted of various sections or themes, as well as The Jack Billings Dancers. The Olympia version of the Supershow even featured a pop musical group in an attempt to modernize the show.

As one so often one sees, all good things come to a sad end, and in 1967 the Mills circus closed for the final time, when steeply rising costs and the ever-growing attraction of television had to be acknowledged. At the last charity performance of the Mills show, the event was attended by not only the Queen and Prince Philip, but also the Prince of Wales, Princess Anne, Princess Margaret, Princess Alexandra, the Earl of Snowdon and Mr. Angus Ogilvy. What a fantastic royal occasion!

Perhaps the most charming anecdote attached to the final appearances of Mills in London was when the Duke and Duchess of Kent took their young son Prince George, only three and a half years old, to the circus for the first and final time. The Duchess commented to Cyril Mills, “Yes, he really is too young, but this is your last circus, and we did not want him to grow up without having seen it.” **BW**



Poster 11

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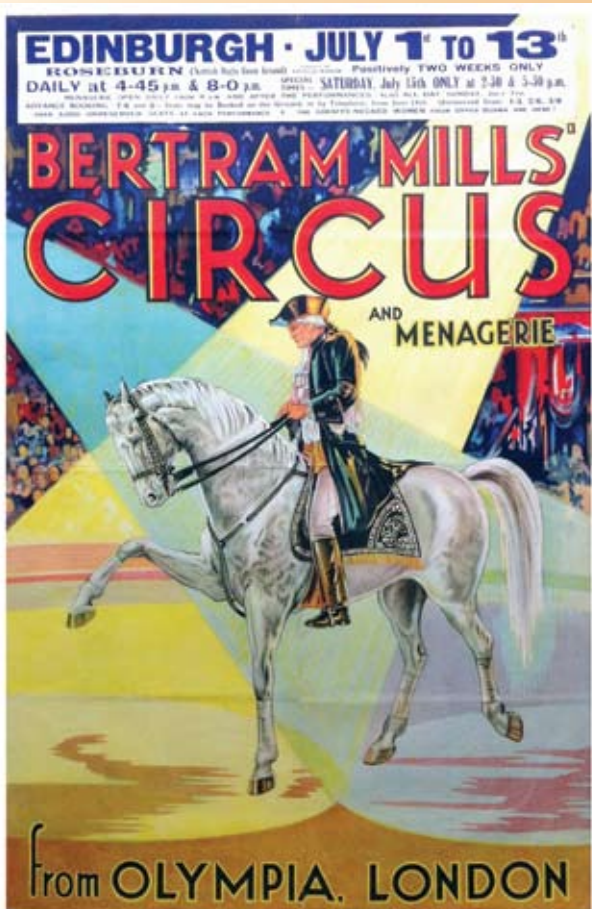


Poster 12

Steven B. Richley Collection



Above,
Poster 13
Steven B. Richley
Collection



Left,
Poster 14
Steven B. Richley
Collection



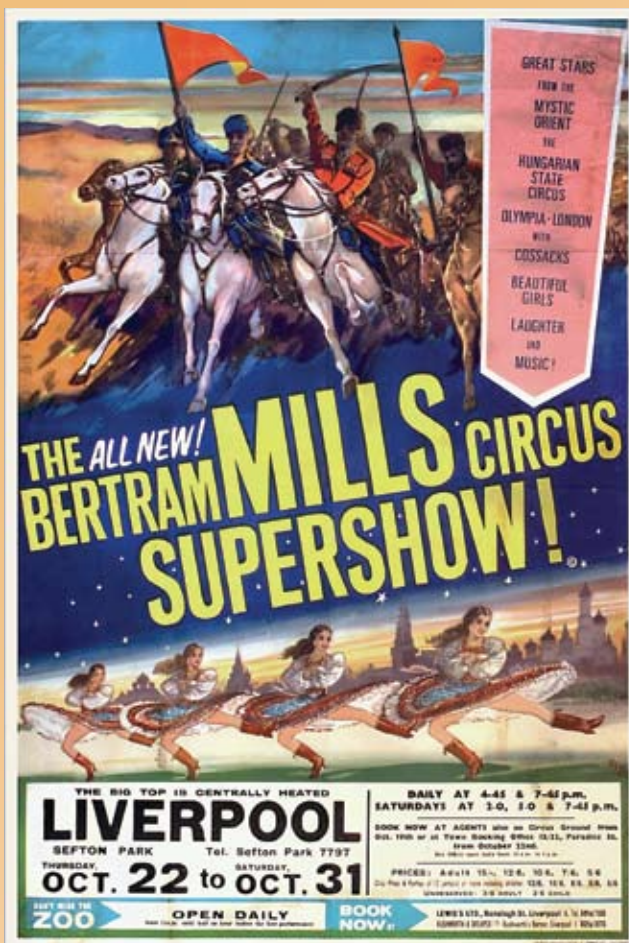
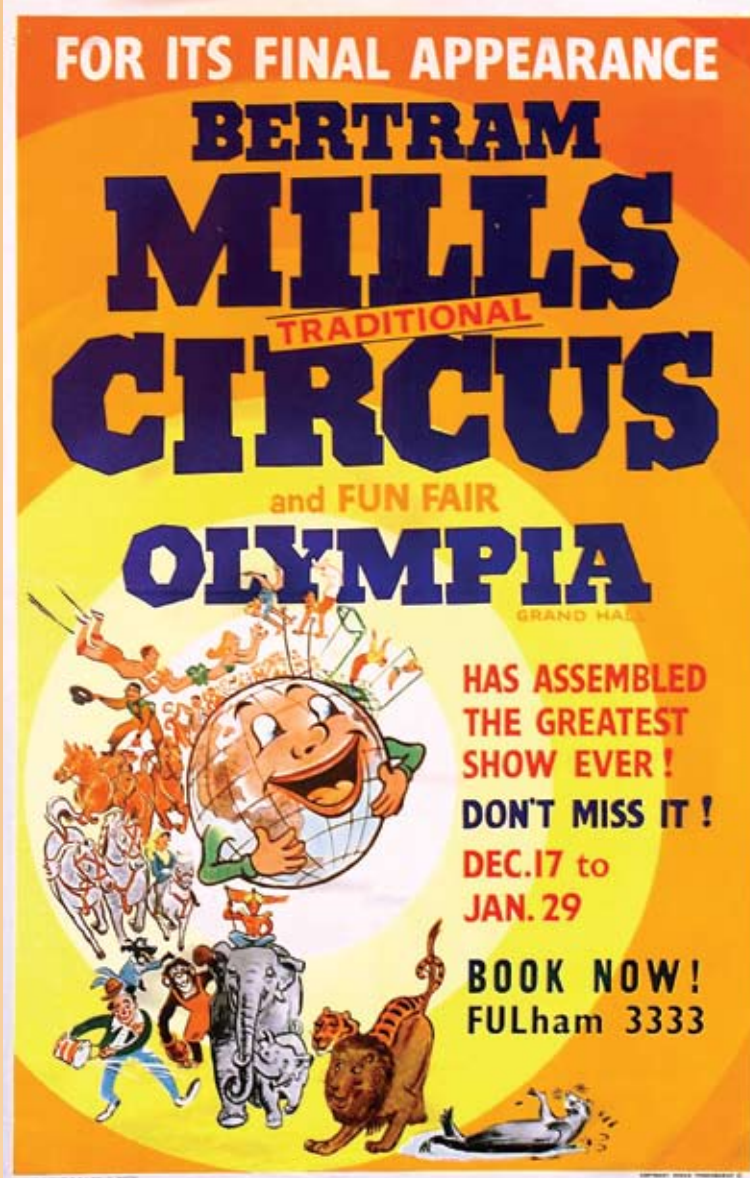
Right,
Poster 15
Steven B. Richley
Collection



about the author...

Ever since the age of eleven when he was given a circus poster featuring a roaring lion, Steven B. Richley has had an interest in the circus and its advertising art. He possesses a collection of some 3,000 circus posters from around the world. He has published three books on circus poster subjects, and regularly writes for the *King Pole* circus magazine. Steve is currently providing material and consultancy services to a number of exhibitions across the United Kingdom celebrating 250 years of the circus.

His website is doublecrownbooks.com.



Poster 16 (top left), Poster 17 (above), and Poster 18 (bottom left)

Steven B. Richley Collection

THE CIRCUS WENT TO WAR

Show Business among the Troops in World War I

by Joel R. Parkinson

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German soldier in full gear with his M1916 steel helmet and Gew98 rifle performing a slack wire routine at a Kompanie Fest, June 30, 1918.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

The opening days of World War I were fast-paced as the Germans quickly advanced through neutral Belgium into France in August of 1914. The Battle of the Marne in September 1914, halted this German momentum. Over the following fall and winter, the Western Front stabilized into a fixed line of trenches and fortifications stretching from Switzerland to the English Channel. Then for four bloody years no substantial gains were made by either side in breaking this stalemate. The Eastern Front similarly stagnated. Millions of men under arms were stuck in the muddy trenches and faced daily monotony when they were not facing the possibility of death.

Among the myriads of soldiers from Austria-Hungary, Germany, Belgium, France, Britain, Australia, Russia, and eventually America, some had hidden circus talent. A few were even former circus performers. It is not surprising that some of these soldiers would resort to killing time and amusing their buddies by performing makeshift stunts, acts, and even mini-circuses. All over the world little circus performances would pop up here and there to pass the troops'

time of day.

Come away to a strange and fascinating time when hidden talent emerged in the training camps, troopships, and war zones of the Great War, a time when *The Circus Went to War*.

At least since the Roman circus there has been an odd symbiosis between circuses and the armed forces. That relationship grew in the years leading up to the Great War.

Before World War I, the Germans were especially adept at observing the logistics of American circuses and their one-day stands. In 1891, Buffalo Bill toured Germany. The Wild West was shadowed the whole time by about 40 German officers assigned to follow the show and take detailed notes on the logistical feat of tearing down, moving, and setting up each day. From these observations the Imperial German Army developed the rolling field kitchen (a wood stove on wheels) so the troops could be fed on the march and in the field. When Germany invaded Belgium in 1914, they did so with technology they developed from studying Buffalo Bill's Wild West.¹

During 1900-1901 Barnum & Bailey toured and performed in Germany and Austria-Hungary. German army officers again visited the circus to glean ideas from the show's logistical movement.² How could an American railroad circus tear down, move to another city, set up, and present two shows to audiences of thousands, all in just a 24-hour cycle?

One method observed by the Germans was the use of "runs" (narrow ramps) at the end of railroad flatcars temporarily connected by crossover plates. Wagons were quickly rolled on and off the train lengthwise instead of hoisting them over the side as the Germans had done up to that point.³ The U.S. Army also switched to loading trains lengthwise using runs after observing railroad circuses.⁴ Another railroad circus innovation was the idea of chock blocks. These were simple angled blocks of wood wedged between wagon wheels and flatcar floors. They had short spikes on the bottom for driving into the wooden deck boards of flatcars

way street. The Imperial German Army may have borrowed some logistical ideas from American circuses, but likewise American circuses freely took ideas for circus acts from the military. Wild west shows were in some measure reenactments of the Indian Wars. Circus performers have sometimes worn military-style uniforms as costumes. Hugo Zaccchini (1898-1975) got the idea for his human cannonball act while he was serving in the Italian artillery in World War I.⁶

According to a poster of the time, in 1898 the Barnum & Bailey Circus presented a spec of the "Total destruction of the Spanish Fleet, on the Cuban Coast. The greatest naval battle of modern times, truthfully represented by fac-similes of all the huge fighting ships." Spanish-American War propaganda had infiltrated the circus entertainment of the day. Similarly, Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented the military pageant "Preparedness" in 1916 complete with "US Field Artillery in Expert Driving and Whirlwind Battery Drills."⁷

At the time, the Great War had been waged in Europe for two years, and America was less than a year away from entering the war.

The symbiosis between the circus and the military reached a climax in World War I itself. No longer did one borrow and take from the other. The two became one at times when soldiers took to improvising their own circus acts in the field.

Why did they do it? Several antecedents probably contributed to the proliferation of circus acts by soldiers during the Great War. These factors are evident enough in American life and were to some degree shared by European cultures of the time.

The first of these antecedents was familiarity. Before 1860, the circus was not universally anticipated as an annual ritual in the U.S. Dan Rice and others were quite popular, but their audiences were geographically limited in a largely immobile society. Therefore, the impetus for amateur circus acts would likely have been minimal during the Civil War. After the Civil War, overland shows began to widen circus accessibility in small towns, and then in the late 1800s and early 1900s railroad circuses had a much greater reach across the country. By

World War I, the vast majority of young American troops would have previously delighted in the arrival of the circus train, street parade, and big top performance.

Indeed, the familiarity of the circus to the rank and file is evident from several sources.

Private Robert H. Lotz (Company F, 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division) wrote a letter dated December 16, 1917, to his mother in Canton, Ohio. In it, he described the troop train that carried him to Camp Stuart in Newport News, Virginia: "The train our company was on was some train. There were about 8 or 10 coaches full of soldiers, 1 mess car, several freight cars full of supplies and equipment,

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German Panzer 38(t) tank on a railroad flatcar c. 1940-1941. Note the chock blocks wedged around the tracks. Chock blocks were a trick of the trade taken by the Germans from American railroad circuses before 1914 and used in both World Wars.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

holding the blocks and wheels in place. Armed forces previously tended to lash down wagons onto flatcars with a bit of overkill to make sure they did not tumble off a moving train. Chock blocks were a simple trick of the circus trade that speeded the loading and unloading of wagons and equipment without losing them in transit. In 1914, the Germans used the methods they probably learned from Barnum & Bailey to speed up their mobilization and movement during their invasion of Belgium. The timetable was all-important to pull off the Schlieffen-Moltke Plan for quickly invading France through neutral Belgium.⁵

This symbiosis between circuses and armies was a two-

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"Keeping his hand in: Private Smith, the company bomber, formerly 'Shinio,' the popular juggler, frequently causes considerable anxiety to his platoon."

Cartoon by Captain Bruce Bairnsfather from *Fragments From France*, 1917.

several flat cars with wagons and field artillery on them, and about a half dozen cars of horses and mules. Looked like a circus train."⁸ The brevity of the simile in this last sentence is telling. Until then, troop trains were rarely seen in America

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The Red Baron's Flying Circus at Douai, France in 1917 or 1918. Dizzying aerial dogfights, transport by colorful trains, and tented camps all contributed to the circus analogy.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

which had such a small standing army. On the other hand, circus trains were common and provided a ready analogy for Lotz to enlighten his mother. Sadly, Private Lotz was killed in action on July 26, 1918, in France.

Across the ocean, Captain Bruce Bairnsfather was a British officer in the Great War who became renowned for his "Fragments From France" cartoons.⁹ His cartoons lampooned the contradictions and dismal hardships of trench life in a way that hit home with the troops at the front. The appeal of Bairnsfather's cartoons reached well beyond his British compatriots. For example, American First Lieutenant John H. Geiszel (Company D, 151st Machine Gun Battalion, 42nd Rainbow Division) filled the margins of many pages of his copy of *Fragments From France* with notes about how the cartoons mirrored his own experiences in the trenches and under fire.¹⁰ One of Bairnsfather's recurring characters was Private Smith, formerly "Shinio," the juggler. Private Smith had a habit of finding disconcerting props – like live grenades – to juggle. The cartoons by Bairnsfather were made-up, but all-too-true. Thus while Smith and his antics were fictional, no doubt Bairnsfather contrived the juggling motif because he knew it would be meaningful to the British troops in the trenches. He knew that a circus juggler would resonate in that crazy context.

Additional testimony to the pervasive influence of the circus comes from the Central Powers. Manfred von Richthofen's Jagdgeschwader 1 (Hunting Squadron 1) became known as "The Flying Circus" as it waged its dogfights in 1917 and 1918. This designation was only in part because of their dazzling displays in the air.¹¹ The Red Baron's brightly painted Albatros and Fokker aircraft were transported by rail on flatcars resembling a colorful circus train. His squadron moved regularly and set up in temporary tented camps on makeshift airfields all along the Western Front. The similarities with a circus were apparent. Hence, the "Flying Circus" moniker which carried over to barnstormers after the war even though they had no train or tents, was understood in terms of the more widely familiar circus.

It made sense to some soldiers to understand this strange new world of warfare they were thrust into through the lens of their beloved circus memories.

This leads to the second antecedent to circus acts by the troops: aspiration. Most soldiers were young and could easily remember their childhood days of backyard circuses and dreams of running away to join the circus. Hints of these circus aspirations show up in surprising places, even among grown men.

The Schutzengesellschaft (Defense League or Shooting Club) of Allstedt, Germany, performed their little Zirkus Busch on March 2, 1914. This was probably a spoof on the acclaimed Zirkus Busch in Berlin. Five months later, most or all of these men would have been mobilized in the German Army as war broke out. They would have taken their dubious talent and apparent circus zeal with them to the Eastern

and Western Fronts with ready-made crowds to amuse, at least once the war of mobility settled into a long stalemate.

For a soldier in the Great War 100 years ago, emulating circus stars would be as natural as today's teenager wanting to be a rock star.

Transfers were the third antecedent to circus acts in World War I. Of the millions of men at war, one would expect that at least a few troops would be drawn from the ranks of circus troupes. This presumption is confirmed by reports of the time.

On April 28, 1917, Congress authorized conscription. The Selective Service Act went into effect on May 18, and young men across America were to start registering on June 5. Meanwhile, Ringling Bros. arrived in Boston on June 3. Local conscription officials were Johnny-on-the-spot opening an office on the Ringling showgrounds on June 5 to make sure that the eligible men on the traveling circus were immediately signed up for registration.¹² They were not about to let circus jumps aid and abet draft dodging. Ringling advance men estimated that about a third of the show's men were within the age range for selective service.

Later, Private Chester O. Hyde (Machine Gun Company, 308th Infantry Regiment, 77th Division) was training at Camp Upton, New York. On February 13, 1918, he wrote a letter to his mother, going into some length about a circus the 308th Infantry put on in the auditorium at Camp Upton. In part the letter reads, "Last night we went to the 308th Circus. It was surprisingly good. We had regimental animals, clowns, acrobats, band, etc. The leader was an old fellow who was with Barnum and Bailey."¹³ So at least one veteran of Barnum & Bailey found his way into the 308th Infantry Regiment. Many of these 308th men – both circus performers and spectators. – were later in the "Lost Battalion" famously surrounded by the Germans in the Argonne for eight days (October 2-8, 1918).

Similarly, the First Division Circus in Montabaur, Germany, on July 11-12, 1919, included several performers who were previously connected to circuses in civilian life.¹⁴ Amateurs

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Improvised circus of the Schutzengesellschaft (shooting club) in Allstedt, Germany, March 2, 1914. A few months later, these enthusiasts were off to war.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

may have brought raw talent to the war, but professionals brought seasoned circus experience.

Finally, the fourth antecedent to circus acts in World War I was demand. No soldiers on duty in front line trenches would be distracted by performing or watching circus acts. They needed to be alert and pay attention. Otherwise, they could be surprised by a raid, caught off guard by shelling, or shot by an enemy sniper. However, it was a different story for troops in reserve behind the lines. There, a would-be cir-

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The ANZAC Coves were a troupe of Australian or New Zealand veterans of the failed 1915 Gallipoli Campaign, clowning around on the Western Front in France, c. 1916.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

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Joyeux Noel! French clowns and band of the 97th Regiment at a regimental Christmas party, c. 1916.

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Troop I of the 4th Cavalry demonstrating their Roman riding at the Mid-Pacific Carnival in Hawaii in 1915. Note the crowds and tents visible in the background.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

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Spicing up KP. Self-portrait ink drawing of French poilu A. Guilleume juggling potatoes during kitchen patrol, c. 1915.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

cus star could find a captive audience of bored troops with time on their hands and not much to do.

There was no USO in World War I. The United Service Organizations (USO) was founded years later in 1941. Since November 1941, the USO has sent troupes of celebrities to travel the world entertaining the troops in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. No such amusements were sent to the Western and Eastern Fronts on any systematic or large scale in 1914-1918. Troops at war were largely on their own to drum up entertainment.

Hidden talent among the soldiers filled this vacuum with captive audiences. If a man could sing, dance, or juggle, disengaged troops would spontaneously gather around to watch. The circus has always been a diversion from the daily grind; circus escapism found its zenith amidst the woes of the World War.

Familiarity, aspiration, transfers, and demand set the stage. What some executed on that stage was worthy of center ring.

There were clowns! It seems like wherever the war was dull and gloomy some ruffled collars or greasepaint might show up. It has already been noted that several men of the 308th Infantry Regiment were clowns in their circus at Camp Upton, New York, February 12, 1918. The First Division Circus had at least 40 clowns¹⁵ plus their Imperial Clown Band at Montabaur, Germany, July 11-12, 1919.

The troops of other nations were not to be left out of the tomfoolery. The ANZAC Coves were Australian or New Zealander clowns in France (1916), "direct from the firing line." That was a bit of ballyhoo. ANZACs were the Australian New Zealand Army Corps. The Gallipoli Campaign was an unmitigated disaster for the Allies with British, Australian, and New Zealand troops stuck on narrow beaches like ANZAC Cove fighting the Turks for several months in 1915 before being withdrawn and redeployed to France. Maybe the irony of troops from a failed campaign appearing as clowns at the Western Front was apparent to this troupe of ANZAC Coves.

The French also got into the action with their 97th Regiment clowns performing with members of the 97th Regiment Band for Christmas, c. 1916.

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Austro-Hungarian acrobat of the 75th Regiment midair in Galicia, 1916.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

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An acrobatic German performed a one-man show in Poland on July 24, 1916. The harmonica band to his left played along.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

Then as now, Europeans thought of Americans as gun-toting cowboys from the wild west. The Yanks did not disappoint this stereotype, and cavalry would sometimes rustle up some good old Roman riding, rough riding, and Cossack riding at various camps in the U.S. and overseas. Troop I of the 4th

Cavalry performed impressive Roman and stunt riding at the Military Tournament of the Mid-Pacific Carnival in Hawaii in 1915. They were stationed at Schofield Barracks and participated in these outdoor performances as well as in a parade in Honolulu. Among these Roman riders was Corporal Edward W. Lewis from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, who rode his way around his stomping ground abreast on two horses. After the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, Lewis was transferred to the 6th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division and sent to fight on the Western Front.¹⁶ It is not hard to imagine him showing off his riding skills in France if he was able to get his hands (or feet) on a couple of decent horses.

Circus juggling was not confined to Captain Bairnsfather's cartoons. Some soldiers tossed all kinds of things around. Some also captured their experiences by drawing and painting during the war.¹⁷ One French soldier did both. French poilu A. Guilleume and his comrades were bored peeling potatoes for two days circa 1915. Resorting to his dormant talent, he livened things up with an impromptu *pomme du terre* juggling act. Having dual talents, he proceeded to draw and depict the episode on a blank postcard to mail home. Who said KP had to be dull?

Contortionists got bent out of shape and soldier acrobats tumbled into place during the war. Near Galicia (straddling what are now Poland and Ukraine) one acrobat jumped and flipped for his 75th Infantry Regiment in the Austro-Hungarian 19th Division. Under the command of Feldmarschall-Leutnant Boltz, these Austrians had a restful lull in fighting and watched one of their own tumble through the air in 1916. In the German Army, Unteroffizier (Corporal) Fischer showed off his balancing skills on anything he could do a handstand on, including a German 77mm field gun. Field

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A tightrope act in a German one-ring circus built at St. Mihiel, France, in April 1916. The bloody Battle of Verdun was raging just 20 miles away.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

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German soldiers executing a balancing act at St. Mihiel, France in April 1916. The wooden-framed back door on the left allowed for the dramatic entry of various acts.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

artillery was meant to blast at the enemy; instead, Fischer had a blast showing off on it in 1916.

One unidentified soldier of the German 6th Battalion, 46th Landwehr Infantry Regiment, 3rd Landwehr Division apparently put on quite a one-man show for his outfit in Poland on July 24, 1916. Photos show him twisting and turning on a makeshift wooden table, looking like an Olympic

gymnast on a pommel horse. A “band” of four German comrades playing harmonicas accompanied him. The spotter looking on would have been even more vital when this man was on the improvised high wire overhead.

Indeed, slack, tight, and high-wire walking were all demonstrated by troops in the field. A German infantryman complete with M1916 steel helmet, full uniform, and Gew98 rifle performed on the slack wire for his unit at a Kompanie Fest on June 30, 1918. Only his slippers were not regulation. After all, boots were not made for walking on slack wires.

In all these examples, the circus acts were improvised and occasionally impromptu. However, some troops went to great lengths to achieve the desired diversion. In 1915, Germans built a “Soldaten-Zirkus” on flat ground near Avricourt, France. It had no ring, but soldiers performed various acts on open ground surrounded by canvas sidewalls. A full regimental band played along.¹⁸

About 80 miles to the west of Avricourt, the St. Mihiel Salient along the Western Front was firmly held by the Germans for about four years. During this long occupation, the Germans settled in and built cottages, tennis courts, bath houses, theaters, and planted vegetable gardens safely behind the front line trenches in their little swath of France.¹⁹ At St. Mihiel itself, German troops even built their own outdoor one-ring circus arena in April of 1916. At that time, some of these troops would have been in reserve or resting from the notorious Battle of Verdun raging about 20 miles away. The 42-foot diameter ring was made of earth, retained by the same kind of wattle revetments that kept the dirt walls of trenches from collapsing. These revetments were sticks and branches woven together like a basket

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A makeshift Ferris wheel built for fun by German troops on the Eastern Front.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

to make a supporting lattice. Around this ring were about six concentric rows of bleachers. Many more men could stand on the slope of the hill behind the seating. A log stage provided opportunities for other kinds of entertainment. There was even a framed back door to the circus allowing for the dramatic entry and exit of varied acts including a wire walker and an acrobatic troupe that presented balancing feats.

When time and circumstances permitted, some troops even jury-rigged their own carnival or midway rides. Some Germans on the Eastern Front constructed their own hexagonal Ferris wheel with six benches for a relaxing go-around. On the other side, Czech Legion troops fighting for Russia built a similar, but somewhat simpler, ride with four benches. Bored minds must think alike.

After the war there was an interesting flying act executed for American soldiers and sailors at Le Mans, France on June 26, 1919. It is unclear who the three men were on the flying trapeze. However, the rigging and net appeared to be very professional. The men spotting from the ground were all U.S. Navy personnel and a U.S. Navy band played tunes for the somersaults and catches. Thus, the daring young men on the flying trapeze were possibly U.S. Navy sailors who had come inland to ply the trade they knew from their previous lives.

All of these examples were just the tip of the big top. Many more known circus soldiers could not be covered in the scope of this article. Beyond that, there is no telling how many unsung martial circus acts impressed, amused, and distracted weary troops around the world in 1914-1918. These were improvising upstarts who made do with what they had on hand. They were show biz entrepreneurs in a death-defying market. They were intrepid stuntmen who did not know if their show would go on beyond the next battle. Let's hear it for all of these bygone wartime circus performers. However, the top honors for military circuses have to go to the First Division Circus in Montabaur, Germany, July 11-12, 1919. **BW**

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U.S. Navy flying act in action at Le Mans, France, June 26, 1919. Even the spotters below and the band playing on the right were Navy men.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

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16. Corporal Edward W. Lewis papers, Joel R. Parkinson Collection.
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THE GREATEST SHOW IN THE A.E.F.

The First Division Circus in Occupied Germany, 1919

by Joel R. Parkinson

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"The Queen of Sheba Pageant," Grand Entry and opening spec of the First Division Circus in Montabaur, Germany. A marching band leads the way at about 10:00 o'clock on the hippodrome track. The Royal Guard follows at 9:00 preceding the Queen of Sheba carried by eight slaves. Following the Queen is her court of lovely lady bareback riders and a "Grand galaxy of Circus Stars."

Joel R. Parkinson collection

From time-to-time, soldiers of many nations took it upon themselves to perform improvised circus acts for their buddies during World War I. However, no amateur circus in the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) - or on earth for that matter - could match the scope and caliber of the First Division Circus in Montabaur, Germany on July 11-12, 1919.

After a hard year of fighting in France and several te-

dious months of occupying Germany, the First Infantry Division was preparing to return home in the summer of 1919. As a farewell performance and a last hurrah, the Big Red One orchestrated a circus complete with street parade, midway, sideshow, menagerie, and three rings. It is an interesting coincidence that the First Infantry Division was nicknamed the "Big Red One" while Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus was known as the "Big One."

For two days, Montabaur, not far from Coblenz, Germany, was transformed into a circus extravaganza. All was done with men, horses, and equipment organic to the First Infantry Division. Most of the patrons were soldiers of the First, Second, and Third Infantry Divisions. Many Allied big shots and German civilians also attended. It was a sight to behold.

America had entered the Great War by declaring war on Germany on April 6, 1917. The American Revolution made the United States independent. The American Civil War unified the United States as a nation. Yet even after the Spanish-American War and the Mexican Punitive Expedition, the United States was still largely an isolated country in 1917. Two oceans separated the U.S. from the rest of the tumultuous world and America stood without much of a standing army.

The Regular U.S. Army was relatively small at about 150,000 men. This was in stark contrast with several million men fighting in Europe. The process of enlisting, training, equipping, and transporting a large army to France would take about a year. The Yanks were coming, but not right away in sufficient numbers to make a difference. In the

meantime, the First Infantry Division (about 27,000 men of the Regular Army) was constituted from existing regiments and battalions and was sent to France, arriving at St. Nazaire in late June of 1917.¹ A plurality of combat units forming the First Division were drawn from Texas.² General John J. Pershing also arrived in France in June of 1917, as the long buildup of American forces in France began.

With *esprit de corps* typical of a good combat unit, the First Infantry Division boasted to be the first Americans in France, the first in sector, the first to shoot at Germans, the

first to attack, the first to raid enemy trenches, the first to capture prisoners, the first to suffer casualties, and so forth. The First Infantry Division fought hard at Cantigny, Soissons, St. Mihiel, and in both phases of the Meuse-Argonne Campaign. The division suffered casualties of 4,996 killed and 17,324 wounded.³ Only the Second Division experienced slightly more casualties among the 34 American divisions that saw combat on the Western Front.

Then fighting abruptly ended at 11:11 a.m. on November 11, 1918. Celebration was short-lived. Terms of the Armistice called for Allied troops to occupy the Rhineland in Germany while formal peace terms were negotiated. The

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The 18th Infantry Regiment of the First Infantry Division marching into Germany in December of 1919.
Who knew the circus was coming to town?

Joel R. Parkinson collection

hardened combat divisions that had seen the bloodiest fighting and suffered the heaviest losses would march into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation instead of going home. That “rained on their parade,” and nine American divisions (including the First) began a long, hard march into Germany instead of being able to fully celebrate the victory.⁴

From mid-November to mid-December, this march to the Rhine was grueling. At first, the large army had to keep pace following withdrawing Germans, maintaining a 24-

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Lieutenant Northrup of the 18th Infantry Regiment heading up the First Division Circus parade in Cologne, August 4, 1919. Joel R. Parkinson collection

hour buffer. Later they had to pick up the pace to close this gap in order to prevent looting in the vacuum between the Allied and German armies.⁵ Men marched each day for as many as twelve hours in the cold, rain, and mud on empty stomachs. Troops normally got an early morning breakfast, but usually had nothing else to eat until nighttime when rolling kitchens could stop and fire up.⁶ Soldiers were worn out when they reached their assigned destinations in Germany.

By June of 1919, the First Division and the rest of the Army of Occupation had been in static positions in Germany for several months with little to do beyond routine training and some organized sports. It had been more than two years since most of these Americans had their annual fix of the circus coming to town. No doubt, some reminisced of their childhood circus days. Some had amateur skills. Some troops even had professional experience on circuses. The product of this collective memory and talent was the First Division Circus in Montabaur and later in Cologne (Koln), Germany.

Remarkably, in the 450 pages of

the official First Division history there is only the following brief mention of the circus: "The first annual reunion of the Division was held at Montabaur on June 6th ... After dinner, the crowds were amused by the First Division Circus, organized and presented by the 1st Ammunition Train. So great was the success of this remarkable show that it was later exhibited to the Army of Occupation in Coblenz and the British Forces in Cologne."⁷

This passage is at best confused and basically incorrect. It is possible that the 1st Ammunition Train previewed a few simple circus acts at the reunion on June 6, 1919. However, it was not possible that the entire First Division Circus was presented on that occasion. Time, space, and circumstances would not have allowed it. Further, the show was later exhibited in Montabaur, not Coblenz. At any rate, this brief mention hardly does justice to the monumental feat pulled off by the division in such short order.

The passage does, however, note that the First Division Circus made an encore performance in the British Occupation Zone at Cologne. That took place on August 4, 1919. (Whether the circus in Cologne occurred on just one day or two is uncertain.) The parade and circus performance were the same in Montabaur and Cologne, and photos accompanying this article draw from

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Bareback riders "Faith," "Hope," and "Charity" rode sidesaddle in the parade in Cologne and were the first act in the First Division Circus performance. Joel R. Parkinson collection

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The 5th Field Artillery Band played on the Hobnail Revue bandwagon that the bandsmen built on a truck chassis in the First Division Circus parade at Montabaur.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

both of these occasions.

Planning for the First Division Circus actually began three days after the June 6 reunion on June 9, 1919.⁸ That was only about a month before show time. However, they were initially very limited in the work they could do beyond brainstorming and preliminary preparations. The First Division could not yet even set firm dates for the circus. The Allies were technically still at war with Germany. Surmising that the Germans were dragging their feet in peace talks, on June 18, the powers that be instructed the Army of Occupation to take up combat positions to increase readiness for possible resumed hostilities.⁹ It was not until Germany signed the Peace Treaty at Versailles on June 28, 1919, that the First Division was released to let its guard down and could focus on the circus in earnest. That left just twelve days to set firm dates, print and distribute advertising, arrange for train and truck transportation and timetables, finish building the floats and units for the parade, construct the circus lot, and put together a three ring performance to be proud of. What the First Di-

vision pulled off so quickly was something like pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

The First Division Circus Executive Committee was mostly officers from the 1st Ammunition Train with Lt. Colonel H. Hervey as the Director and Captain Tom C. Davis as the Manager.¹⁰ Second Lieutenant Clem Page of the 16th Infantry Regiment was one of the few officers on the Executive Committee who was not from the 1st Ammunition Train. He was Assistant Manager of Clowns and doubled as the ringmaster for the show. A subordinate General Committee consisted of one officer and one enlisted man from each of the division's other regiments and battalions.¹¹ In typical army fashion, the circus would have a definite chain of command.

With management in place, what did the First Division have on hand? Thousands of men with a wide array of skills, plenty of horses, whole convoys of wagons, and all kinds of materials. The Division also had soldiers who were extremely resourceful. The "fog and friction of war" that Clausewitz famously wrote about, means that no strategy ever works entirely according to plan. Field commanders and their troops need to figure things out on the fly when they are confronted with the unexpected. The First Division was used to improvising during the war. For its circus, all this creativity and expertise would be marshaled to new ends.

The 1st Ammunition Train (about battalion strength)

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The 1st Engineers Regiment float was a mock ship in dazzle pattern camouflage on a truck (Montabaur).

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The 16th Infantry Regiment Band shortly before World War I. They were later disguised as the Imperial Clown Band in the First Division Circus parade.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

was especially used to challenging logistics. During the war, its men were tasked with moving thousands of tons of rifle, machine gun, and artillery ammunition over muddy roads and rough terrain to keep front line combat troops and batteries supplied. Combat troops could fight a day or two without food; they could not fight without ammo. So aerial attacks, artillery shelling, rocky ground, long dis-

ances, and bad weather could not be allowed to prevent the flow of these critical supplies. The 1st Ammunition Train used trucks, horses, wagons, mules, manpower, and “hook or crook” to deliver these explosive heavy goods to the supply companies of combat units that would carry the load for the last and most hazardous leg. The 1st Ammunition Train was perfectly suited to plan and execute a makeshift circus. Obviously, they knew how to get things done. And, there were some among them who knew something of what a circus should be. The 1st Ammunition Train would become the prime mover for the First Division Circus.

Lieutenant Colonel Hervey

and his staff knew that just because they built a circus, people would not necessarily come. People needed to get there. So when the time came, First Division trucks plied the roads leading to Montabaur to carry troops from outlying areas to the circus.¹² A specially arranged train also ran regularly from Coblenz to Montabaur for the same purpose.

Circus day commenced with a traditional street parade through Montabaur beginning at 10:00 a.m. Each battalion and regiment in the First Infantry Division contributed a float to the long parade line-up in addition to the regimental bands, performers, and other units engineered by the 1st Ammunition Train. Like the Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee, the First Division Circus Parade was longer than just about any parade staged by American railroad circuses.

Heading the parade was Lieutenant Northrup of the 18th Infantry Regiment.¹³ Northrup wore formal coattails and a top hat while riding a classy steed. However, he was not the real ringmaster of the First Division Circus. He was a stand-in for 2nd Lieutenant Clem A. Page of the Machine Gun Company,

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The Imperial Clown Band marching through the streets of Montabaur, Germany. Behind them is the Battery C, 6th Field Artillery float carrying their French 75mm gun, “firing the first shot at the Huns” (Montabaur).

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The 28th Infantry Regiment float had several soldiers armed and ready with Browning Automatic Rifles guarding Lady Liberty (Montabaur).

Joel R. Parkinson collection

16th Infantry Regiment.¹⁴ Ringmaster Page was busy back at the lot preparing for the big show, and Northrup was just filling in as a kind of figurehead or parade marshal.

The Big Red One's sense of humor peppered the length of the parade beginning with an early horse-drawn cage labeled, "Wild Animals." It carried a rabbit and a goat.¹⁵ This kind of absurdity was way ahead of its time predating the ferocious rabbit in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* by 56 years.

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First Division military police filled the boots of cowboys and the moccasins of Indians in the parade (Cologne).

Joel R. Parkinson collection

Gender bender bareback riders "Faith," "Hope," and "Charity" rode sidesaddle in the parade as well as their being the first act in the performance. Two Roman chariots, each drawn by four matching horses, also appeared in the parade in addition to their being the closing act in the show.

The 2nd Machine Gun Battalion float featured two machine gun nests in action. The 18th Infantry Regiment float carried a large floral U.S. flag. The 5th Field Artillery Band played on the Hobnail Revue bandwagon built on a truck chassis and it was just one of many bands in the line-up.

One striking float by the 1st Engineers Regiment was a ship in dazzle pattern camouflage, mounted on a truck. Norman Wilkinson, a British maritime artist and officer in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (RNVR), conceived dazzle camouflage for ships in 1917.¹⁶ Ships were painted in sharp, broken patterns to confuse U-boats as to their identity, speed, range, and direction. Supposedly, this might mislead a U-boat commander peering through a periscope to position his submarine in the wrong place for firing torpedoes. There is little evidence that dazzle camouflage had much effect in confusing U-boat commanders. However, by 1918 all merchant vessels and warships of the British and U.S. navies were painted in dazzle patterns. Most Doughboys were transported to France on troopships painted this way. So American troops along the parade route would have immediately related to this float as representing one of their common experiences.

The 5th Field Artillery float resembled a huge 155mm artillery shell labeled "Jerry's Goat Getter." The 1st Sanitary Train float replicated a hospital ward. The 1st Supply Train float was a transport ship. The 2nd Field Signal Battalion featured a telephone switchboard and a couple of field telephone operators (high tech stuff for the time).

Circumstantial evidence suggests that the Imperial Clown Band was mostly or entirely the 16th Infantry Regiment Band in comical disguise. No known sources verify its members' identities. One reviewer noted that they, "took all of the 'jazz' out of some 'jazz' music."¹⁷ It must have sounded dreadful.

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Bringing up the rear of the parade was, "almost a calliope" by the 1st Ammunition Train (Montabaur).

Joel R. Parkinson collection

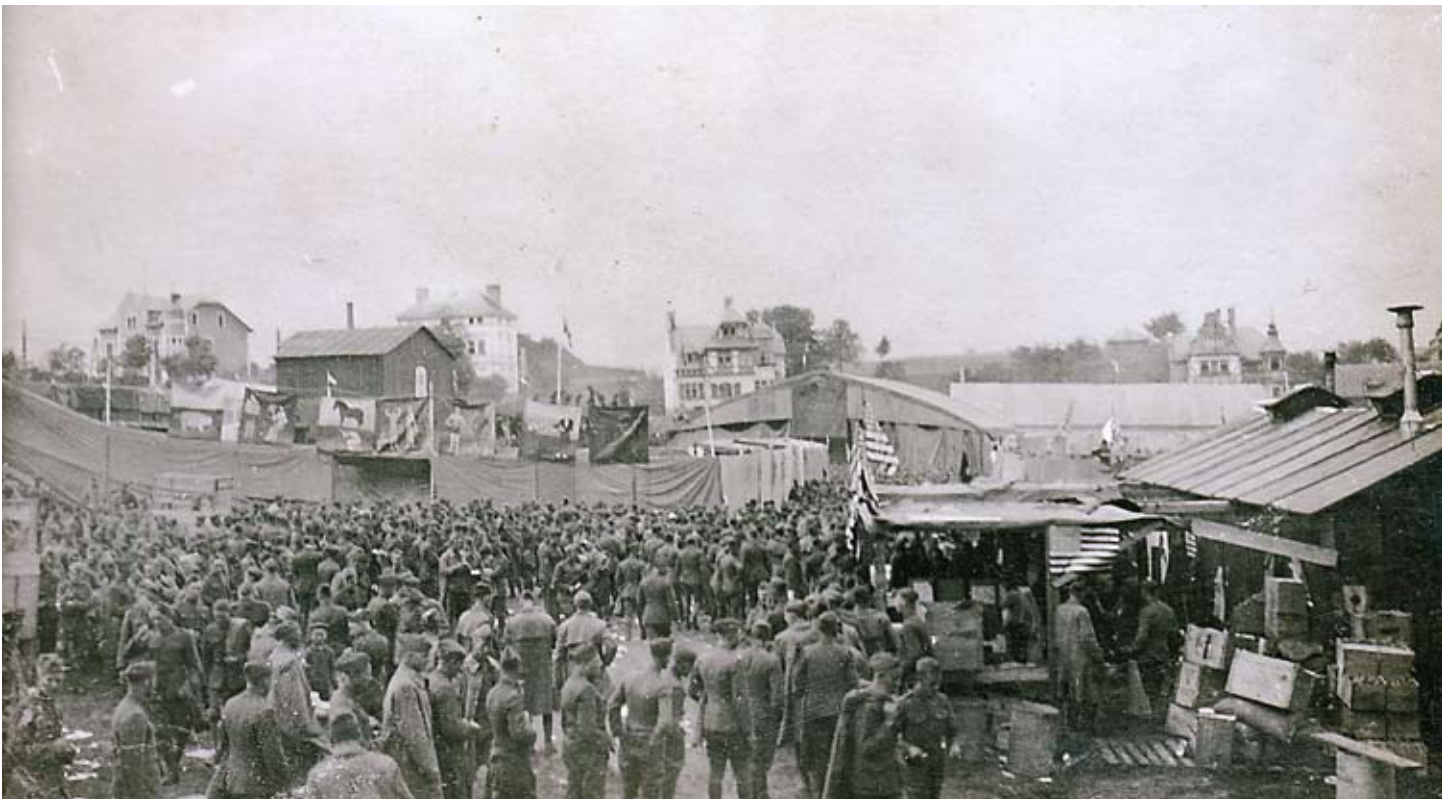
Following the clown band was the Battery C, 6th Field Artillery float drawn by ten beautiful black horses. The float upheld, as though on a pedestal, a single French 75mm gun, "firing the first shot at the Huns." Supposedly, this was the very same field artillery piece this battery used to fire the first American shell at the Germans back on October 23, 1917.

The 28th Infantry Regiment float had several soldiers armed and ready with Browning Automatic Rifles surrounding and guarding Columbia (Lady Liberty). The BAR was a superb weapon, vastly superior to the French Chauchat automatic rifle that was standard issue among American infantry in the war. The Chauchat jammed all the time, in part because its moon-shaped magazine was open on the sides and got clogged with dirt and mud. The new BAR fired powerful .30-06 ammo flawlessly from a closed box magazine. The BAR was only used in combat for the last month or so of the war, but it made a disproportionate impact on fighting. In their circus parade, the men of the First Infantry Division proudly displayed their Browning Automatic Rifles as crucial in the defense of Liberty.

Drawing up the rear of the parade, in fine circus form, was "almost a calliope."¹⁸ Apparently, the 1st Ammunition Train scrounged a

pump organ or piano or something and mounted it on the back of one of their motorized trucks. Voila! A calliope, sort of, to pipe the crowds to the circus lot. At least these savvy and clever troops knew what was supposed to punctuate a proper circus parade.

When the crowds followed the street parade to the circus lot, they found a busy midway, side show, menagerie,



The First Division Circus midway in Montabaur. Out of view on the left was the Days of "49" Show. On the right are concessions stands. In back is the bannerline for the sideshow.

Fred Dahlinger collection

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The First Division gave away beer mugs like this one as prizes on the midway.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

and circus arena with three rings and two stages.

The midway was crowded with minstrels, a BB gun shooting gallery, dunking tank, high-flying swings, moving picture shows, photo booths, all kinds of concessions, and a restaurant.¹⁹ A dozen YMCA girls in western garb were enlisted to dance with AEF troops visiting the Days of "49" Show which was a wild west saloon and dance hall.²⁰ These gals were the only real ladies in the First Division Circus. All the other "women" on the show were portrayed by men.

Prizes on the midway included First Division Circus beer mugs.²¹ The turnaround for producing these mugs was quick. There were only twelve days from when the circus dates were set after the June 28 Peace Treaty until the first day of the circus. Some of these mugs included a figure on the front that could arguably be perceived as either a clown or a drunken German. As another example of Big Red One humor, this poked some fun at former enemies while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability should some locals

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First Division Circus attractions in Montabaur. On the left is the sideshow with sidewalls all around. The barn-like building with the Big Red One emblem was the movie theater. The large tent to the right housed the menagerie. Part of the filled circus arena is seen on the far right.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

take offense.

Everything at the circus was paid for with circus “Bucks” at the exchange rate of one German mark per Buck.²² This was the only currency permitted. Troops and other patrons could buy these Bucks at various booths on the grounds with German marks, French francs, British pounds, or American dollars.

The First Division Circus sideshow had enough humbug to make P. T. Barnum proud. Strongman Hercules S. Samson supposedly used cannonballs for indoor baseball. There was the Tattooed Man, Prest O. Change, the Hairless Wonder contrasted with the Human Gorilla having a jungle crop of hair from hair tonic, Nature’s Mystery, and the Bearded Lady (remember, these were all men).²³ The Living Pin-Cushion was, “a model husband; he can carry pins in any part of his body.” The Glass-Eater had, “more panes in his body than Notre-Dame has in its windows”²⁴ and, “devoured enough glass to make the price go up.”²⁵

The Wild Man was said to have been caught in the “fastnesses” of Mont Sec “with a can of goldfish” as bait. Mont Sec was the high ground that overlooked the St. Mihiel Salient during the Battle of St. Mihiel. It was riddled with German bunkers and gun emplacements that rained fire down on the First and other divisions attacking the Salient on September 12, 1918. The tunnels and dugouts of Mont Sec provided a good back story for this Wild Man who one surmises was supposed to be a mad German. So frenzied was this Wild Man that he ranted and raged in a cage in the parade.

Whatever Nature’s Mystery was, it was, “for men only.”²⁶ Then there were the Sultan’s Own Dancing Girls.

Fatima and La Bello Rosa “had all the twists and squirms ever invented and some new ones of their own ... I’ve told all that I can without going to the ‘brig.’”²⁷ This newspaper account was an early example of tongue-in-cheek self-censorship. These two features in the sideshow are some of what would have disqualified the First Division Circus as strictly a “Sunday school show.”

All twelve persons in the sideshow were actually enlisted men from the First Division.²⁸ Whether in the sideshow or in the three rings, cross-dressed performers were meant to neither mock nor promote transgender lifestyles as such. The First Infantry Division was an all-male population. So

any female roles in the First Division Circus were played by men out of necessity. In this regard, these First Division soldiers stood in the Shakespearean tradition of all-male theatrical troupes. (Women were played by boys or men in the Bard’s original productions.) Similarly, POWs in prison camps put on plays with men in serious roles of women. Nothing political or moral was necessarily meant by these men acting in the places of women.

The wild animals in the First Division Menagerie were borrowed from the zoo in Cologne.²⁹ On display were water buffalo, Nubian lions, Bengal tigers, caribou, a llama, a camel, four bears, Shetland ponies, a mule, and Bruno the big elephant.

All this led to the big show. A long list of Allied generals attended. The First Division Circus played to four straw houses in Montauban over two days on July 11-12, 1919. Seating in the arena accommodated 8,000 people. With an “equally large number” standing and sitting around the track, attendance reportedly reached 15,000 for each performance.³⁰ Not too shabby, considering that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows debuted that same year with a big top seating 15,000.³¹ The First Division Circus certainly aimed to play in the big leagues and it is doubtful that anyone in Europe saw a circus rivaling this size since Barnum & Bailey was in Germany in 1900-1901 and France in 1902.

As stated before, the ringmaster was 2nd Lieutenant Clem A. Page of the Machine Gun Company, 16th Infantry Regiment.³² He was the ubiquitous figure wearing a top hat and tails seen among the three rings in many photos of the performance. All the performers listed in the program were enlisted men. Thus, Lieutenant

Page outranked everyone else in the performance. The First Division just could not shake a chain of command, even for fun.

The performance opened with the Grand Entry and opening spec of the, “Queen of Sheba Pageant. Beautiful daughter of the Orient carried by eight slaves, preceded by the Royal Guard, followed by twelve eunuchs and surrounded by a court of lovely ladies. Grand galaxy of Circus Stars in her train, gathered from the four corners of the Earth.”³³ Incidentally, the “court of lovely ladies” consisted of the “Beautiful Bare-Back Riders, Faith, Hope, and Charity” who presented the first act. So, the opening spec doubled as

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The front cover of the First Division Circus Program.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

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Display 2: Bicycle Bears, "used to bear messages in the Rushin' Army" (Cologne).

Joel R. Parkinson collection

the entry of the first act into the rings.

This was followed by Display No. 2, Bicycle Bears, "used to bear messages in the Rushin' Army."³⁴ It is unclear where the performing bears and elephant came from. One anonymous source suggests that they were from the "Hagenbeck Circus." However, this is probably not credible. For one thing, Circus Carl Hagenbeck (distinct from Hagenbeck-Wallace in the U.S.), was reported to have played in Coblenz on February 2, 1919, several months before the First Division Circus.³⁵ It would have been long gone by the summer of 1919. Furthermore, it is unlikely that a circus would lend performing animals to competition that basically day and dated it.

The program boasted 40 clowns in number,³⁶ but later on

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This photo provides a good view of the rings and stages used in the performances in Cologne. It also is believed to show Happy Hicks and his high-school horse "Prancer" in the center ring during the opening spec. One of the chariots is in the lower right corner.

Joel R. Parkinson collection

named 55 men as clowns.³⁷ This was in addition to the large Imperial Clown Band. While the program does not mention a clown walk-around, at least one photo shows what appears to be just that. Moreover, clowns were all over the place during the performance. When the rings were occupied, some clowns were seen goofing off on the track. When rough riders or chariots were chasing around the track, clowns were up to their antics in the rings. Apparently, the 1st Ammunition Train producers wanted there to be enough action going on that no one could take it all in at once.

Some of the performers were formerly on circuses in civilian life.³⁸ So the performance was loaded with daring First Division talent including Wire-Walkers, Jazzy Jugglers, Rolling Ropers, Agile Acrobats, O'Neil and his smart little dog, "Teddy", Fearless Flying-Trapeze Fiends, and Gamey Gymnasts.³⁹ The contortionists, "tied themselves into veritable Gordian Knots" and the wire walkers, "made old Newton's theory of gravity foolish."⁴⁰

Display 11 was Elegant Elephants, "Trained to execute with precision a large number of cute and dainty tricks."⁴¹ Mimo the performing elephant⁴² appears to be different from Bruno the elephant in the menagerie. Photographic and other evidence suggests that Mimo might have been the only elephant in this act, at least in the Cologne performance. So, the plural "Elegant Elephants" was a little bit of circus hyperbole.

As one might expect, the First Division Circus was heavy on horse acts. Display 5 was Bucking Broncs. Display 14 was, "Pfour Pretty Prancing Ponies, Graduates from high-school and they do some very nice steps and stunts." ("Pfour" is not a typographical error; the First Division Circus producers were obsessed with alliteration.) In Display 10, Happy Hicks and his high-school horse Prancer did, "many stunning stunts."

There were no fewer than 45 Merry Monkey Drillers⁴³ (Display 8) and 37 Rough Riders⁴⁴ (Display 15). Coursing Cossacks in Display 16 were, "Genuine Cossacks from Cossackovitch, led by Henry Bulcheviskyovitch."⁴⁵ One should be careful how to pronounce that last name; obviously, whoever wrote the program was hinting that the shtick was baloney.

Near the end of the show, "the thrilling spectacle of the stage coach hold-up by Indians and the wild skirmish be-

tween the red-faced bandits and dashing cowboys brought the vast crowd to its feet in frenzied shouts."⁴⁶ Both the cowboys and the Indians were actually First Division military police. Roman Races (Display 18) preceded the climactic Chariot Races with, "Four-horse teams raced by Ben Hur Co., Ltd., for the Jewish National Sweep-Stakes."⁴⁷ During the Friday evening performance on July 11, one of the chariot horse teams got spooked and charged into the crowd. No one was injured, but the chariot was smashed and destroyed beyond repair.⁴⁸

As the crowds filed out of the arena after the evening performance on July 12 and the lights were turned off, the First Division geared up to take its show on the road to Cologne (Koln), Germany, in the British Sector. There they made encore performances of their parade and show on August 4, 1919. (The Cologne performances do not appear to have been as well-attended as those in Montabaur.) The First Division Circus was not a one-stand wonder, but was a traveling circus with one and only one jump.

The men of the First Division had a narrow window to make their circus dreams come true. They could not jump the gun and throw themselves fully into the circus project until the Germans signed the Versailles Treaty on June 28, 1919. Nor could they take their time. The First Division began to leave Germany on August 15, 1919, and started to embark at Brest, France on August 18 for home.⁴⁹ The First Division Circus at Montabaur on July 11-12, 1919, and its reprise at Cologne on August 4, 1919, threaded this needle before its men sewed up their service in Europe.

When it was all said and done, the First Division Circus

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Display 11: Elegant Elephants starring Mimo (Cologne).

Joel R. Parkinson collection

was a testimony to how much these young men far from home loved and missed their American circuses. It was also an exhibition of the creativity, ingenuity, and dedication that was so prevalent among American soldiers in so many ways.

The First Division Circus was the biggest backyard circus ever. It was a street parade, midway, sideshow, menagerie, and three-ring circus pulled off in record time. There were more first of Mays on the First Division Circus than on any other show. Virtually to a man, everyone on the First Division Circus was “with it and for it.” For them it was not just a job; it was a mission. And, it was humongous: humongous in size, humongous in scope, and humongous in attendance. As the back of the First Circus Division program proudly proclaimed, the First Division was, “First in everything ... including circuses.” That was not just ballyhoo. That was true. **Bw**

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25. “E.F. Entertainment Records Broken; First Division Circus Scores Big Success,” *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, p. 2.
26. *First Division Circus Program*, p. 4.
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28. *First Division Circus Program*, p. 12.
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34. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
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about the author...

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Blackpool The World

by Vanessa Toulmin

This paper was originally published as a chapter in Blackpool Tower: The Wonderland of the World, Bocco Publishing, 2012. It appears here in edited form.

Circus historian George Speaight defined the history of circus “as the story of that entertainment of human bodily skills and trained animals that is presented in a ring of approximately 13 meters in diameter with an audience grouped all around it.” The form of popular entertainment known as circus developed in England around horse acts. Although travelling zoological exhibitions, acrobats and trick animal acts were all features of entertainment in the 18th century and earlier, it was the combination of these features within a circular structure that became known as the circus.

The founder of modern circus, Philip Astley (1742-1814), staged a show in London in 1768 featuring trick horseback riding and live music. It was presented in a circular structure and named Astley’s Amphitheatre. He later added other acts, such as acrobats, a clown, and a band of musicians to his performances. However, the term circus, as used to describe this type of exhibition, was coined by Astley’s con-

The Blackpool Tower Circus first opened to the public in May of 1894. This poster from that year illustrates the newly built resort in Blackpool, England.

Heritage Blackpool



Blackpool Tower Circus: Underland of the World

temporary and rival Charles Dibdin, who opened The Royal Circus in London in 1772. It was Dibdin's term that became used internationally to describe the mixture of horsemanship, comic turns and animal acts programmed as a theatrical spectacle. Nevertheless, by the start of the 19th century, the majority of circuses in America and Europe were based on ideas established by Philip Astley.

From the 1850s, European and American circuses began to diverge in style and structure, but they still were largely based on the Astley principal of a single ring. Although the acts performed in the ring became more innovative and complex, the concept remained the same. In the United States, however, the growth of the railways in the 1870s allowed circuses to travel large distances on a scale never seen before and the great train shows were born. To accommodate the bigger attendances, circus owners added extra rings with bigger and bigger tents. Although this became the nature of the circus across the Atlantic, the circus in Britain continued well into the 1890s and beyond as a single ring enterprise. This was the general setting as a new circus structure was about to open in Blackpool, England.

The Venue

Blackpool Tower Circus was built during the final wave of circus build-

ings in the United Kingdom and is the only surviving Victorian arena still in use today. Although not constructed as a stand-alone circus building in its own right, the Tower circus was positioned at the base of the tower, between its four legs. The circus first opened to the public on May 14, 1894 and has not missed a season since that time. Admission to the circus was separate, and people could enter without purchasing a ticket to go into the main Tower building. The original décor was bare, with the water circus or aquatic feature being the centerpiece of the circus. The threat of competition from the newly opened Alhambra Circus in 1899 and the Great Yarmouth Hippodrome after it was built in 1903, incorporating circus into their programs, inspired the Tower Company to hire Frank Matcham, as the circus, in the words of John Bickerstaffe, was "hardly in keeping with what could be seen elsewhere in the Tower." Today's lavish interiors were part of the redesign of the circus in 1900 by Matcham, which also included two structural changes. The position of the stalls and pit were reversed, and the orchestra was stationed in a handsome horse-shaped box over the south entrance.

Matcham had already worked on Hengler's New Cirque in Glasgow in 1885 and would go on to design the London Hippodrome as both a circus and variety theatre. However, the

Tower circus remains the only arena designed by Frank Matcham that is still in use solely for circus entertainment. His other buildings in Liverpool and London were converted to variety or theatrical use in the 1900s. The decorated interiors of the circus compete with the ballroom in terms of ornate plasterwork and tiling, but their influence is Moorish and Oriental, providing a contrast to the Baroque splendor of the ballroom. Described by the *Blackpool Gazette* and the *Era* as a dream of "Moorish magnificence" and reputedly influenced by Matcham's visit to the Alhambra in Spain, the whole design was intended to create a sense of travel, fantasy and Moorish illusion, complete with a harem area. A range of companies was hired to carry out Matcham's exquisite designs with building work by Messrs. J. Parkinson and Sons of Blackpool and fibrous plaster and artistic decorations by Messrs. de Jong and Co., who also worked on the Tower lounge. The changes, which included a marbled entrance and magnificent tiling throughout the venue, were described in the *Blackpool Gazette* and *News*:

"The main entrance from the Promenade is through a magnificent vestibule where, beneath a ceiling bright with tracery in beautiful hues, stand the columns and walls in var-



The Tower Circus building is the only surviving Victorian arena still in use today.

Paul White – Wonderland of the World



A breathtaking view of Blackpool Tower Circus ceiling plasterwork, decorative scheme and chandeliers.

Visit Blackpool, Peter Beavis

iegated marble, while a red and white square pattern in marble is placed underfoot.... The patron of the stalls will next pass through a crush room, scarcely less splendid than the marble entrance-hall outside. The ceiling is decorated with a Cor-

Renovation work completed over the years has preserved most of the architectural features of the Tower Circus redesign of 1900.

Paul White – Wonderland of the World



dolova cornice, the walls paneled in Canary wood, and the floor of marble. Further along the corridor his attention will be attracted by a handsome dome ceiling, illuminated with electroliers, and decorated with that most striking peculiarity of the Moorish style, a pedentive cornice..."

The reporter went on to describe the changes:

"The pit, the gallery and, in fact, every part of the circus is ornamented with infinite variety indeed, but in a manner completely harmonious

with the style adopted. It is not until one comes to view the main building itself that the magnificence of the scheme bursts upon one. The general appearance embodies all that light, graceful beauty peculiar to the architecture of the East..."

The remodeling cost £7,000, and it was praised for both its visual impact and for its economic success. Work undertaken on the entrances to the circus allowed greater flow of visitors into the venue. As John Bickerstaffe remarked when seeing the transformation, "remember the railway arches we used to call a circus" and described it as a "palace of pleasure." At the Company AGM in 1900, Councillor Jack Howarth thanked the Board for making the circus one of the most magnificent of its type in the world.

From 1903 on, the Board was proclaiming both the architectural beauty and financial viability of the circus: "the finest circus in the world, unique in construction, entrancing in decoration – a show sight in itself." In the winter of 1919, the circus was redecorated, with the magnificent interiors being fully preserved.

Alongside the astonishing décor which remains in place today, the circus area also contains some of the original animal areas and stables from



Circus Knie tigers were presented in the 1958 Blackpool Tower Circus.

Heritage Blackpool

the 19th century, which are in themselves important features. Although the animal cages and stables are no longer used due to the decision to discontinue animal performances in 1990, they are an important part of the unique history of the building. In 1928, £4,961 was spent on alterations to the dressing rooms and stables, which enabled the housing of more horses and larger troupes of big cats to perform in the circus. This was followed in 1930 by the purchasing of land at Staining for winter quarters for the circus animals, including exercise areas and a circus ring for rehearsals. Ownership of this property was continued until 1960, when the land and buildings were sold. In January 1933, the circus table, ram and steelwork under the table were all renewed, and the Bank Hey Street entrance to the circus was re-modelled.

The capacity was reduced over the years from the original 3,000 seat and 3,500 holding (standing room) up to 1924, when it was reduced to 2,680 and 3,000 holding. By 1941, it was reduced again to 2,250 seating and holding 2,500, and by 1951 it was decreased to 1,791 and a holding of 2,000. This remained constant until 1966 when the seating capacity was reduced slightly to 1,788. It currently stands at 1,400. Gordon MacKeith, the resident architect for the Tower Company, designed a new frontage for the Tower buildings in 1969 at a cost of £100,000, and a new canopy and circus

mosaics around the entrance were designed by Jeanne Mount and installed in 1970.

Jeanne Mount, nee Martin, worked as a mosaic artist in Cornwall and was married to the sculptor Paul Mount. She was commissioned by McKeith Dickinson to make a large abstract mural for the Golden Mile centre in 1965 (no longer extant) and the firm brought her in again in 1974 for the mosaic work themed on Blackpool's history inside the Nat West Bank on Corporation Street. Eleven mosaics in total were produced - dancing horses, contortionist, clown, sea lion, lions, monkey, acrobats, bear, snake, ringmaster and parrots. They were originally located on the promenade façade. Some are still on display in the Tower but three remain in storage.

Shows

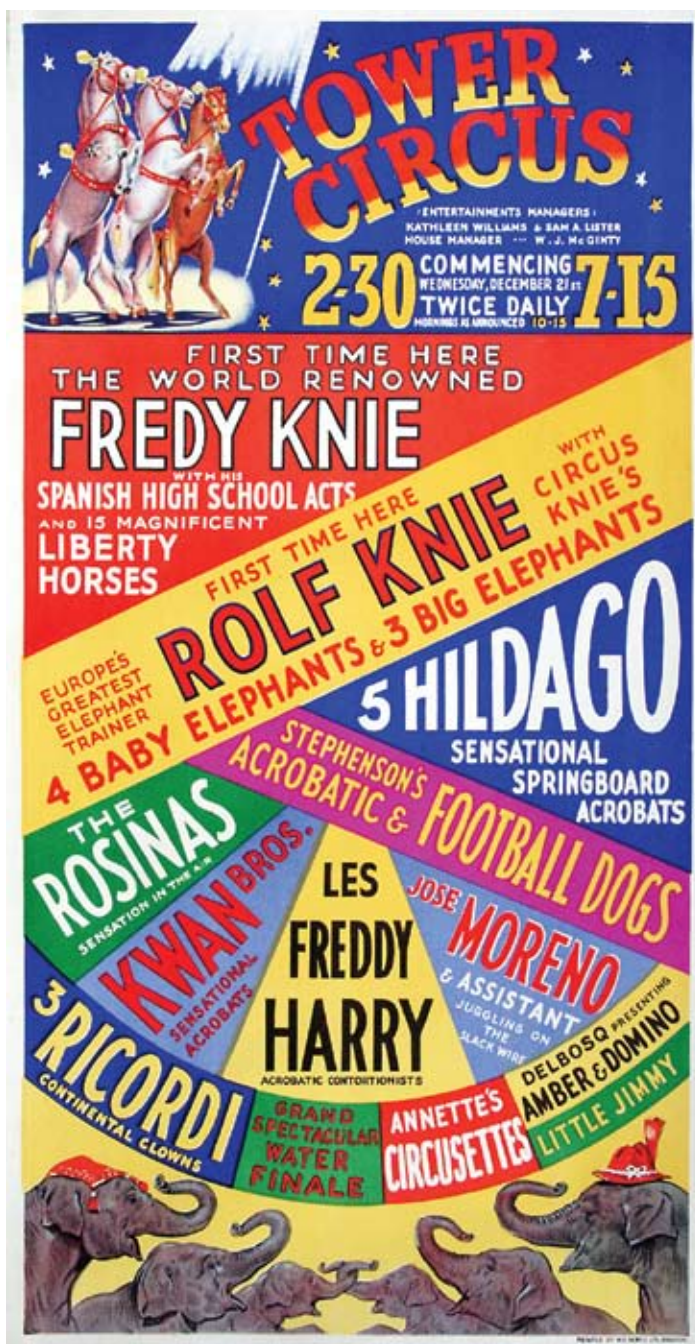
Although primarily associated with circus over the years, a range of differing attractions have appeared in the arena with pantomimes and theatre being added in the 20th century. The circus first presented a Christmas show in 1926, and it also opened as the Playhouse, a theatre in the round venue showing a number of productions including Shakespeare beginning in November 1929.

Boxing shows were presented every Friday evening throughout the winter from 1930 to 1936, and then boxing and wrestling alternated Fridays, beginning in 1937. Wrestling became so popular in the circus ring that from December 1940 on, wrestling shows were promoted every Monday with boxing returning to every Friday. Big Boy Charlie Scott (the Big Bula) was a favorite in the 1940s, with perhaps the most famous being Jack Pye who became such a prominent feature on the bill in the 1950s and 1960s that he became a permanent resident of the town. Pye was one of the foremost professional wrestlers of his day, and he attracted huge audiences.

Another part of the varied entertainments was billiard demonstrations by Joe Davis and Walter Lindrum. Then snooker followed, with the World Championship being held in the circus in 1950 and 1951, when the tournament was won by Fred Davis.

More recently, Showzam's Blackpool's annual festival of Circus Magic and New Variety has also presented a number of different shows in the circus during the February half-term festival. Perhaps the highlight of these was La Clique, an international renowned variety company from Australia that visited in February 2010.

The most famous show associated with the Tower was of course the circus, with its extraordinary water finale. From the celebrated clowning of August and September to



1949 Tower Circus poster

Heritage Blackpool

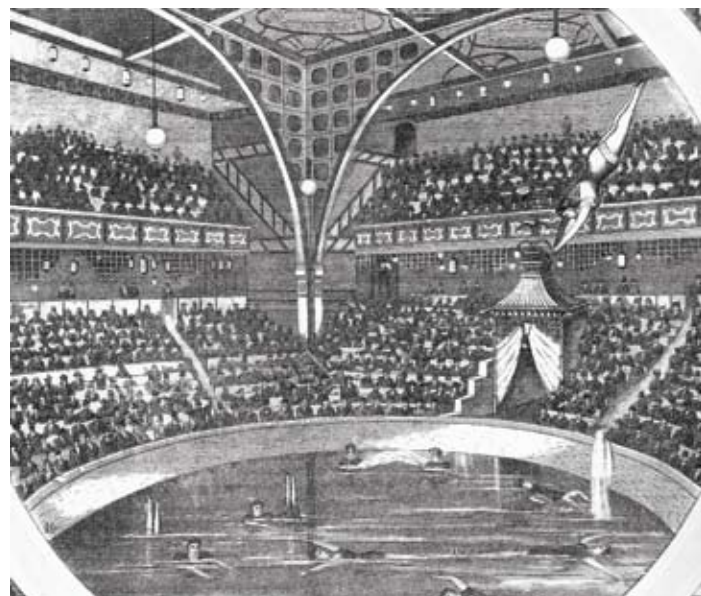
the modern day antics of Mooky, the venue's renown led to *Funny Bones*, starring Lee Evans and Jerry Lewis, being filmed there in 1994. It was described by Al Kennedy in the *Observer* as "creating a sort of love poem to Blackpool and to the life of performance." *Funny Bones* was not the first film to use the splendor of the Tower Circus as a backdrop. The 1928 silent Anglo-German production *Three Kings* was set totally in the Tower and featured three clowns in a love triangle. This film features footage from the 1927 circus production and shows the wild animal enclosures within the Tower and how they were used in the production. One of the most notable scenes in *Sing as You Go*, starring Gracie Fields, was filmed in the circus ring, and highlights of the 1934 season including Doodles the clown can be seen in the

film. Ken Russell also used the circus to recreate the boxing scene in his biopic of Valentino in 1977.

The Water Circus

One of the most famous elements of the circus is the original Victorian water feature where the sinking ring is lowered by a hydraulic ram to just under six feet. Blackpool's Aquatic and Variety Circus opened in 1894 and the mechanism has been part of the performances from that period onward. It is one of only two operating water circuses in the United Kingdom, one of four in Europe. When filled the tank holds 42,000 gallons of water at a depth of up to 54 inches.

Aquatic performances were an important part of European performance culture, in particular in France and Russia. Water spectacles were also a feature of the Hippodrome theatres designed by Frank Matcham including the London Hippodrome, and the Olympia in Liverpool. The original mechanism for the water spectacle was modelled on the Parisian Nouveau Cirque, where the water circus started



This engraving reproduced from the 1895 program depicts the Water Circus that was introduced at Blackpool Tower one year earlier.

Heritage Blackpool

in 1886. When John Bickerstaffe visited Paris in 1893 and saw this incredible piece of machinery, he requested one for Blackpool Tower.

The water spectacle was a main feature of the early circus including a yearly water pantomime produced by Professor James Finney. In 1902, Blackpool Tower Company boasted that the floor mechanism that enabled the flooding of the ring for water performances had never failed. Aquatic displays were an essential part of the finale when in two minutes the circus ring became a water fairyland with swimming displays and illuminated tableaux. Willy Hagedorn's grotto and fairy mountains of 1904, was advertised as



The Golden Linders statue act appeared in the Tower Circus Water Finale in 1957.

Heritage Blackpool

“a combination of water and electrical effects unequalled in the history of entertainment.”

The water spectacle did not just involve swimmers and pyrotechnics. In 1911, Hagenbeck’s pack of 40 polar bears appeared sliding and performing in the water. Captain Woodward’s performing seals were part of the show in 1917 and 1918, and the Hengler’s famous *Tallyho*, which featured horses plunging and diving into the water, was the featured attraction in 1919. In 1933/34, after 40 trouble-free years of performances, the steelwork sub frames and hydraulic mechanism of the circus ring complete with wooden floor, were replaced in time for the ultimate in water spectacles produced by Clem Butson, the new Entertainment Manager. Butson’s shows have been described as the most daring, innovative and finest of all the water shows produced in the circus. In 1936, his *Arabian Nights*, with its cast of 50 eastern-clad performers and George Lockhart as the Caliph, astounded the audience. Living statuary also became a feature of the water finale with the Crystal Wonders part of the *Symphony in Silver* production of 1938. The water finale soon followed an established formula with either a static act on a rostrum alongside the aquamaids in the water, such as the *Silver Lagoon* water finales of the 1940s, or an aerial act with colored fountain effects.

By 1946, the decision was made to update the wood-

en mechanism with concrete, and the original timber ring fence was replaced. The water spectacle remained a feature of the circus throughout the period with Kathryn Williams, the successor to Clem Butson in 1948, continuing to invest in both the show itself and the finale. Bernard Crabtree reigned as Entertainment Manager beginning in 1960, and despite a decrease in budget for the circus, the water finale remained the highlight. The finales of 1967 and 1974 once again incorporated the bridge over the water with the artists waving goodbye to the audience. From 1975, Dick Hurran, the well-known theatrical producer who had staged shows at the Alhambra in Glasgow, brought his theatrical experience to the Tower Circus. His Silver Jubilee show of 1977 was particularly special, with Gina Fossett highlighting the finale as the “Girl in the Moon.”

The water finale continues to be an intrinsic part of today’s circus performance. Peter Jay’s Hippodrome in Great Yarmouth is the other operating water circus in the United Kingdom. With Circus Odessa in the Ukraine and Cirque d’Hiver in Paris, Blackpool Tower’s water show is one of only three from the 19th century operating in Europe today.

Key Personalities

Some of the world’s leading performers have appeared at Blackpool Tower Circus including the Hanneford family

riders in 1914 and the Dorchesters in 1949 and 1950; the legendary animal trainer Alfred Court with his mixed group of leopards, polar bears, lions and tigers in 1937; and Tommy Kayes in 1938 and 1940. The circus of 1939 was incomparable and has been considered by many "to be the Tower's crowning glory." Featuring old favorites such as Lockhart and Doodles, it also included a return visit from Alfred Court, the breath-taking high-wire Wallendas, the seven Martinettis in a knockabout routine, and the first appearance of the young Charlie Cairoli, appearing with his father Jean Marie.

Two of the most illustrious ringmasters were George Lockhart, who acted as stage and equestrian director and ringmaster from 1914 to 1945, and Norman Barrett, who celebrated 25 years as ringmaster in 1990. Born in 1883, at Deptford, London, George Lockhart first entered the ring when he was six years old. During his long association with the Tower, he was perhaps the best known ringmaster in the world who had never worked with a tented circus. He possessed confidence, good carriage, an excellent voice, a sharp wit and a lovely gift for patter. Throughout his long association with the Tower Circus, he was ably assisted by the clown Jimmy Mac. Lockhart's comic routines with the legendary Doodles, who often played the part of the little clown getting the sack from the ringmaster, were classics. He was noted as a strict disciplinarian, who did not tolerate nonsense from either artiste or ring staff. His word was law and woe to any artiste who overran their allotted time in the ring or tried to milk the audience. During his later years, Lockhart appeared at Belle Vue Circus in Manchester and celebrated 80 years in the ring in December 1967.



George Lockhart served as the Blackpool Tower Circus ringmaster for 32 years.

Other ringmasters of note who followed Lockhart included Alfred Delbosq and the actor Henry Lytton, whose routines with Charlie Cairoli became a strong feature of the show. Following Lytton's fatal heart attack in 1965, equestrian director Harold Holt completed the remainder of the season. In 1966, one of the most familiar figures of British circus came to Blackpool when Norman Barrett became ringmaster at the Tower Circus. During his 25-year stay, he became one of the most-loved circus personalities in the country. He remained until 1990 and was the subject of an episode of *This is Your Life*, which was presented at the Tower Circus that year.

Some of the most important names associated with the circus were ones that would not necessarily achieve household recognition, but through their work with the Tower Company would be essential to the production values of the show. One of these was George Henry Harrop, who served as manager and secretary to the Tower Company from 1894 to 1926. His successor, Clem Butson, brought some of the leading acts of the day and top production values to the Tower. During his tenure, the circus was memorable for the quality of the acts and level of production, especially in the water finale that became a feature of the 1930s. Kathleen Williams maintained this high standard when she served as Entertainment Manager from 1947 until her retirement in 1960. She was replaced by Bernard Crabtree, who despite a reduced budget, never allowed the show to fall beneath the exacting standards set in previous times.



Doodles (center) and his clowning colleagues Fiery Jack and Jimmy Mac.
both photos Heritage Blackpool

Blackpool Tower Clowns

Many celebrated clowns have appeared at Blackpool including August and September in the early 1900s, Coco the Clown in the 1940s, and the Rastelis in the 1980s. However, the two names synonymous with Blackpool in the 20th century were Doodles, who appeared from 1915 to 1944, and his successor, Charlie Cairoli, whose last engagement was for the 1979 season.

William MacKallister, aka Doodles, was born in Glasgow in 1877 and spent his early career as a gymnast with Bostock's Zoo and Jungle, appearing also as a high-wire walker from the age of eleven. He performed 30 consecu-

tive seasons at the Tower from 1915 onward and was described as Blackpool's own clown. He was noted for his terse "Shut up" to the debonair George Lockhart. His test for a joke was "Will it make the children laugh?" He is best remembered for "getting the sack" from the ringmaster for some act of impudence, and for the cries of the children pleading for his reinstatement. The *Worlds' Fair* newspaper recalled him as "the little man with his outsize collars following George Lockhart around the ring, defying him to do his worst, twinkling on his tiny feet, shouting with his husky voice." His clowning colleagues included Fery Jack and Jimmy Mac, and in 1923 he was Blackpool's Carnival King. In 1939, he appeared alongside a clown that would surpass his record for consecutive seasons at Blackpool -- that was of course Charlie Cairoli.

Charlie Cairoli (1910-1980) was born in Affori, near Milan, Italy, the son of Jean Marie Cairoli, who was Italian, and his wife, Eugenie Ricono, who was French. During the post-war seaside holiday boom, Charlie Cairoli was the dominant figure at Blackpool Tower circus. He first appeared as part of the Cairoli trio in 1939. With the outbreak of World War II, Charlie and his father were interned on the Isle of Man until they were released and returned to Blackpool in 1946. From 1948 until 1979, he performed 32 consecutive Blackpool seasons. He also presented television shows, and appeared at Royal Variety Performances, pantomimes and variety shows. With his red nose, Charlie Chaplin style bowler hat, eyebrows and costume with a moustache slightly larger than Chaplin's, he was the best-known clown on British television, partly due to his long-running children's show *Right Charlie!* Charlie was an accomplished musician who was accompanied by a succession of whiteface Pauls, including his son Charlie Cairoli Jr. taking the role of Paul from 1974. He was on *This is Your Life* on February 25, 1970, when he was introduced as the "king of clowns." For many, Charlie Cairoli was the essence of the Tower Circus, and year after year he presented a new slapstick routine and musical entrée for the show. Charlie Cairoli retired in November 1979 due to



Charlie Cairoli was a dominate figure in the Tower Circus performances from 1948 through 1979. The ringmaster is Henry Lytton.

Heritage Blackpool

poor health, after a 40-year association with the Tower Circus. He died the following year. His contribution to Blackpool and the Tower Circus was unsurpassed in the 20th century.

Although many brilliant clowns followed Charlie Caroli, the next generation of famous clowns to be part of the fabric of the Tower Circus were developed by the Endresz family from the 1990s onward. Laci Endresz Jr., as Mooky the Clown, is as relevant to today's audiences as Cairoli and Doodles were for 20th century ones. Laci was born in Eastbourne and made his first appearance as a clown in the circus at the age of four. There have been seven generations of his family in the circus on his father's side and nine generations on his mother's side. Although now synonymous with the character of Mooky the Clown, Laci Jr. first drew international acclaim as a

juggler, appearing with his sister Kate. He has worked in most of the leading circuses in Europe, appeared on the Paul Daniels TV Special three times, performed before the late HRH The Princess Margaret in the Royal Command Performance and Prince Rainier at the Monte-Carlo Circus Festival.

Summary

Blackpool Tower Circus is one of the most important circus buildings in the world. As a performance venue, it is without equal in the United Kingdom. It has a history of continuous circus and pantomime use since its opening in 1894. The Victorian water circus apparatus, although adapted and updated in various eras, is equally important, as are the remaining 19th century stables and wild animal areas within the tower structure. Much of the Tower's interior remains intact, and unlike other contemporary circus venues that have undergone much renovation and modernization, it still retains many of its original features.

The threat of closure in 1990 and the attempt by the then owners First Leisure to turn it into an arcade was defeated as circus fans and supporters throughout the world helped get that decision reversed. Laci Endresz Sr. has been producer



Laci Endresz has been producer and director of the Blackpool Tower Circus since 1992. His son, Laci Endresz Jr., has become a Blackpool fixture as Mooky the Clown.

Visit Blackpool, Peter Beavis

and director of Blackpool Tower Circus since 1992. Born in Hungary in 1945, he is a sixth generation circus family member. He graduated from the Hungarian Circus Academy to spend 25 years on the flying trapeze. His wife Maureen sports an equally impressive pedigree being a member of the famous Roberts family. The Endresz family have appeared in shows and circuses throughout Europe with Laci Sr.'s musical clown act, a later development in his repertoire. Laci was appointed the Director of Blackpool Tower Circus after the decision by First Leisure to continue the circus. Since then he has successfully developed the circus, winning the prestigious Best British Circus award on numerous occasions.

The circus today has reverted to the original separate entrance price and the remodeling by Merlin has modernized parts of the Tower but retained Matcham's interior. The Tower Circus is open throughout the season, with three shows daily showcasing a wide range of international circus performers. There is a summer season and Christmas pantomime circus, complemented from 2008 on by the new annual half-time Showzam special in February.

The Tower Circus continues to be one of the top attractions in Blackpool. Merlin Entertainment, one of the largest entertainment companies in the world, and the enterprise that manages the Tower on behalf of Blackpool Council, has pledged to continue this internationally renowned circus. The venue has been described as "the finest in the world," a centre-point for all circus fans and artists.

From its opening in 1894 to the current productions under the mantle of Laci Endresz, the acts and performers

appearing in the Tower are a roll call of circus history. Even W. C. Fields performed in a juggling troupe at the Tower in 1901. For 124 years running, the crème de la crème of circus acts and artists have entertained at Blackpool Tower Circus. **Bw**

The historical images for this article are from the Blackpool Tower Circus collection, a large archive of photographs, posters, programs and more. The collection has received funding for preservation and to make it accessible to the public. Heritage Blackpool, Blackpool Council's heritage service, has also received support from the circus community to research, catalog

and digitize the collections. By working with the people who truly know the circus and who have contributed to its history, the record of the collections will reflect their knowledge. Readers who have an interest in more information or have information or stories about Blackpool Tower Circus may contact Heritage Blackpool at localhistory.centre@blackpool.gov.uk. Images are copyrighted by Heritage Blackpool.

about the author...

Professor Vanessa Toulmin is Chair of Early Film and Popular Entertainment at the University of Sheffield, and Founder of the National Fairground and Circus Archive. She has published 11 books and over 30 articles on aspects of popular entertainment, with a



particular interest in late 19th century circus, fairground and early film. Both as a producer and historian, Vanessa worked as Advisor on Heritage and Regeneration for Blackpool Council and published four books about the resort. She also served as Creative Director of Showzam's Blackpool's Festival of Circus Magic and New Variety. Vanessa is currently on the board of Circus 250, part of the UK's celebration honoring Philip Astley, the originator of the modern circus.

Elfi Althoff-Jacobi's Austrian National Circus

by Al W. Stencell

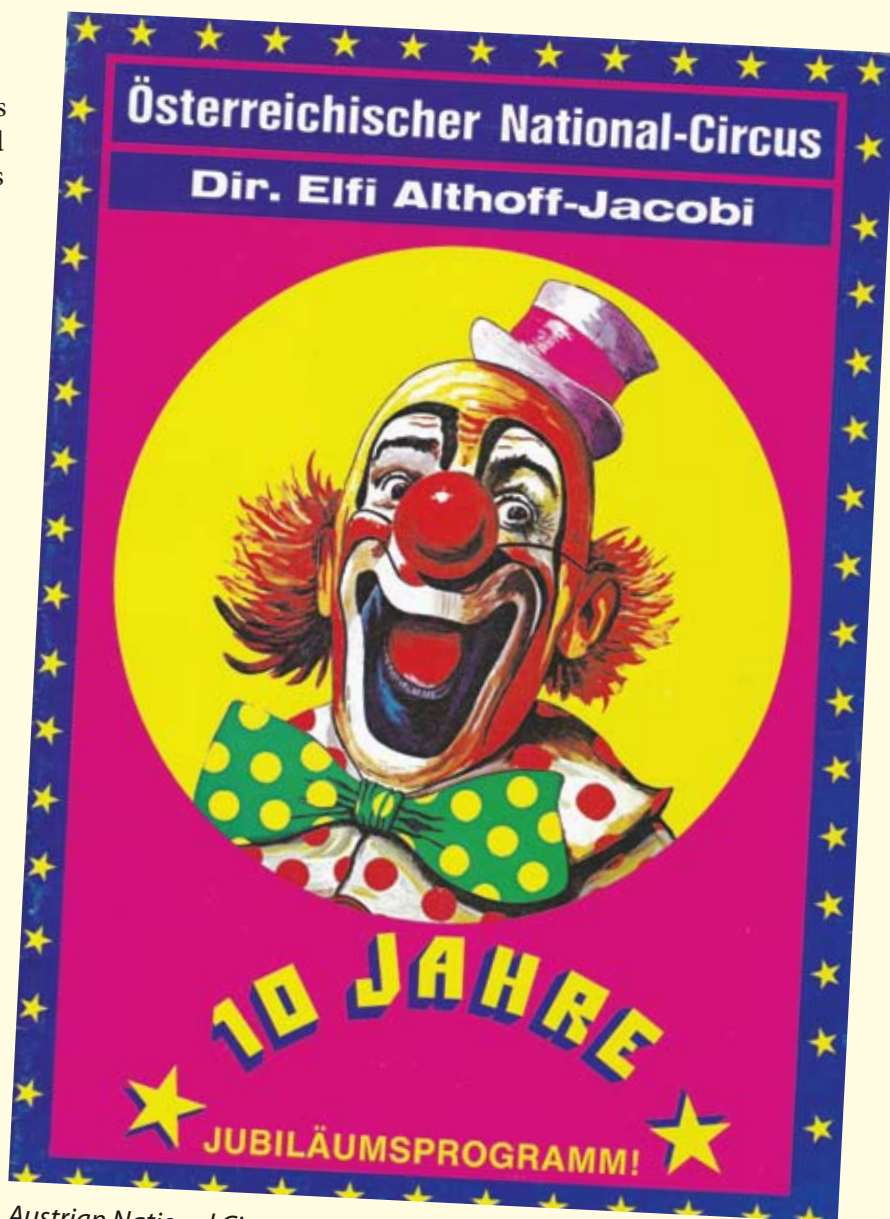
As a teenager, I spent my summer holidays working on carnivals and circuses. By the end of high school, I had worked in concessions on Green Amusements, Gene Cody and Kipling Bros. Circus, and Sells & Gray Circus. I spent a year at college studying to be an architectural draftsman. Then I went back into the circus business for three seasons on Bill English's Hanneford Circus as billposter, 24-hour man, and concessionaire. Off-season, I put out phone promoted hypnotic shows, gospel music concerts, and stage circuses. I was educated by old-time agents Art Doc Miller and Gene Christian, and showmen like Bill English. I gathered "lot" education by listening and watching other showmen. After seeing Fisher Bros. Circus and the big business it was doing in very small towns, I opened Royal Bros. Circus in 1973 in Canada with an American partner.

I envied showmen who had worked on rail shows. However, shows that still travelled by rail in my time were limited to the Ringling arena units and two carnival companies. I was on Ringling for a couple of months in 1967. As a candy butcher, I helped load and unload all the rubber mats that went on the arena floor. Like others butchers, I cursed the "rubber wagon."

Carnival trains with their larger wagons that carried rides and midway shows were more interesting to me than the Ringling tunnel car wagons. I saw Royal American Shows load out for the first time at Davenport, Iowa in 1970. In the mid 1960s, I had visited the show in Canada. I had sold the *Amusement Business* on the show, although I was a small fish. The whale in that department was Joe Pearl. When I stopped to see him in Davenport, he knew who I was and treated me as an equal. I told him I was going to watch the show load out. Joe reached back into his mail wagon and handed me a handful of Tampa cigars saying, "You will need

these to stay awake!" I not only stayed awake but I became a cigar smoker and chewer.

In 1971, I first went to Europe to propose to Shirley. Shirley was living and working in London. We enjoyed an eight-week trip around England and Europe, and saw a number of circuses and fairs. What I saw there kept me returning year after year.



Austrian National Circus program cover, 1993

Al W. Stencell collection

Chasing Shows in Europe

In the 1980s, I was in East Germany when the wall still divided Berlin. I visited the privately owned but government routed circuses Hein and Probst. I saw Circus Busch plus Prague's Circus Humberto. The latter had come into East Germany from an extensive tour of Russia, and it had wagons full of stolen bikes, tires, and batteries. The belly boxes were full of stolen chickens and pigs. The tent crew had picked up a number of German Shepherds that they had named after Soviet leaders. Every time I aimed my camera at something, "Khrushchev" came around the corner to bark at me. These shows were huge and lumbering relics. Outside the Soviet bloc, the circus scene was changing fast.

Dramatic changes occurred through the 1990s as large shows like Krone and Busch-Berlin left the rails for road travel. I saw the huge Sarassani Circus leave the rails and downsize to a tented variety and magic show. I was there the last time Krone used the rails. The decision to leave the rails had been coming for a half dozen years, as Krone management grew weary of poor rail service. The circus had been rebuilding undergears so the wagons could be pulled over the road. During the winter, new longer wagons were built to replace shorter wagons. Krone was going over the road on short jumps and used the train on the longer trips. Circus Knie was undergoing similar changes. By 2006 the elephants, horses and exotic animals were no longer travelling via rail cars but went over the road. Gone were the publicity-grabbing elephant and animal walks through downtown streets.

The big problem for European rail shows was the loss of ramps close to city lots. I saw Enis Togni's huge Italian show, Circo Americano, unload from some of the worst ramps in Holland and Germany. In Holland, Togni had to unload 32 km. (20 miles) from the lot. Enis said he would never come back. Circus Roncalli with a lot of old wooden wagons still

had to use rails. However, the show built a very long portable ramp that they trucked to cities where suitable ramps were not available or the ramps were too far out.

I took many videos of the European shows I saw. The late Bob MacDougall was obsessed with them. In a 2003 letter Mac wrote, "Most just say they don't like foreign shows. Hell, I love them! If they would open their eyes and mind they would be looking at what our big rail shows looked like 50 years ago. Except instead of having coaches on the train, you have living caravans on flat cars."

I started renting camper vans so I could travel non-stop and sleep when I had to. They were cheaper than a hotel room, and they had the advantage of total flexibility in scheduling. I rented a Volkswagen hardtop California standard drive diesel van at the Frankford airport. It was fully equipped with a stove, fridge, sink, pots and pans, bedding and best of all, unlimited mileage. On my next trip, I found B&W Camper Rentals in Amsterdam where I got a similarly equipped Ford Transit van. When I returned the van, I met a woman who was turning in her van. She had written a book about travelling in her van, which she described as "gorilla camping."

Like her, I never stayed in campgrounds. I slept in motorway truck stops, mall parking lots, or on the streets of industrial areas. To bath I used the largest pot under the sink and mopped up the spillage. My bathing technique came from my bucket bath show experience. On Sells & Gray, I had paid the cook ten cents for a bucket of hot water. That was in addition to a bucket of cold water from the water truck. You picked out a section of grass behind a truck. The rest of the procedure mirrored someone learning to go-go dance in a bucket.

Fairly inexpensive video cameras came on the market. One battery provided about 30 minutes of filming. A unit that allowed for charging these batteries through your car cigarette lighter became a game changer. However, re-



The working men's 39 ft. long living quarters wagon proudly proclaimed the show's title in German.

Al W. Stencell photograph



The show's main power lines ran from this diesel generator wagon to another electrical wagon spotted near the big top where the electricity was outsourced to various use points. As in North America, the humming of the generators was a familiar sound on Austrian circus lots.

Al W. Stencell photograph

charging took time. One night I drove from Switzerland to Hannover, Germany and back to recharge all eight of the camera's batteries.

I liked to visit a circus on set-up day. However, I often had to stay over a day to see the performance. I also tried to coordinate my schedule with the show's last day in town so I could watch the last performance followed by the teardown. I stuck to my idea of stopping and seeing whatever circus or fair I came across. I saw a lot of smaller circuses this way. Germany had hundreds of them. Most were operated by gypsy families that German showmen called "comedians." Today these families are having the last laugh, as many still own elephants and cage acts along with numerous equine presentations. So far, they have survived the onslaught of animal activists, and they now make up the animal content on many large European circuses and winter festival programs.

The Austrian National Circus

I obtained routes of circuses and fairs from friends and showmen before leaving Canada. Also, several European fan websites started to post weekly circus routes. Despite planning my itinerary well in advance, I was always changing my plans on the fly. Peter Rebernigg, who had the floss the first season of my new Super Circus International, had told me stories of his family's circus in Austria. I kept those stories in the back of my mind until the fall of 1993 when I got some of the route for the Austrian National Circus (ANC). I flew to Frankfurt, Germany, picked up my camper van and headed

for Steyr, Austria.

When I arrived in Steyr, my first priority was to find show posters. In Europe, it is common to see large circus placards wired to industrial fences and lampposts down the center of the streets. Circuses pay the city a fee to attach posters to city-owned fixtures. When I found paper, I wrote down the name of the lot in clear block letters so that I could show people when asking for directions. If I was lucky, the lot was on a known street or a festplatz (fairgrounds) that was used for shows.

In Steyr, the printed location was no help. When I asked an attendant at an all-night garage, he spoke enough English to tell me the circus was out on a main street near the Steyr truck plant. He said, "Turn off the road when you see a farm on your left. It is back in a field." I found the farm but no circus. I did not want to be driving around someone's farm in the middle

of the night, so I drove over to the night watchmen's gate house at the Steyr truck plant. The watchman repeated back to me the word "circus" followed by shoulder shrugs.

I went back to the farm and drove between the barn and the house, following a narrow lane into another field. I bumped over rough pasture ground towards lights in the distance. Then I heard the familiar sound of a diesel generator. The show's facade was barely visible in the darkness. Toward the back of the lot were two wagons with generating units humming away. I parked beside them. For years, I had fallen asleep listening to my own generator. I was soon snoring.

In the morning, I got my cameras out and walked the lot. Jackie Althoff spotted me and took me into his trailer for breakfast. Making conversation, I asked Jackie about his parents and after some prodding from his wife, Elke, he began to relate his ancestry. Elfi Althoff-Jacobi, who owned the circus, was his aunt. She was on the lot, but was sick and confined to her three living quarters wagons that were used as a salon, bedroom, and kitchen.

The circus I was seeing from Jackie's house trailer window had formerly been Circus Rebernigg - "der Österreichische National Circus." Many of the show wagons went back to that time. Others were from different circuses that Elfi and her then husband, Rudy Jacobi, had operated in Germany from 1967 through 1971. Karl Rebernigg had started his circus in 1945. It was an open-air show presented only in Vienna. In 1950, he first toured Austria. The enlarged show travelled by rail. In 1953/54, it toured in Yugoslavia,



This pipe-framed entranceway was flanked by two large ticket wagons, creating the show's main entrance facade.

Al W. Stencell photograph

and then it stayed in Austria until closing in the fall 1969. In 1974, Elfi Althoff-Jacobi had opened the "new" Austrian National Circus.

I knew some Althoff history. John Schonijahn, who looked after all the animals on my Martin and Downs Circus, had immigrated to Canada from Germany. His father was in charge of a large German stud farm in Osnabruck. That farm became Carl Althoff's winter quarters. I never saw Carl's shows but did see ones that his sons Corty and Giovanni toured. These were quite big and featured a herd of elephants, a large stable of performing horses and ponies, many exotic animals, plus a large polar bear act and mixed wild animal groups. It was wonderful to see a row of cages with bears on one side of the back door and another row of cages with lions and tigers on the other. The steel wagons had uniform lengths of 24-26 feet.

I sat up one night talking with Giovanni and his cousin Jackie. The conversation shifted back and forth between German and English. Jackie and I tried to convince Giovanni that he should get his eyes taken care of. He had stopped working the liberty act because he could no longer see the horses. He was still working the elephant act, although he admitted the elephants were just large shadows moving around him in the ring.

When I visited the Austrian National Circus in 1993, Elfi Althoff-Jacobi was 80 years old. Spring business had been awful, but the summer business had been surprisingly good. Fall weather brought a down turn in attendance. Steyr was described to me as a very good week-end town but the

show was there for two days mid-week. The last day, the matinee drew a thousand plus. Only a few hundred came to the night show.

Over the years, some of the big European shows have used impressive facades for their front entries. The wooden ones used by Circus Sarassani were huge. The two hydraulic wagons that made the entry to Circus Krone were engineering masterpieces. The front entrance on ANC consisted of two long wagons that Elfi had used on her Rudy Bros. USA Erie Hagenbeck Circus in 1967. Each wagon had double ticket windows. Between the two wagons was a pipe-framed entranceway where patrons surrendered their tickets. Above that entranceway was a large collage of light bulbs that spelled out Elfi's full name as well as the show title.

Just inside the circus, entrance was a small rectangular foyer tent covering three concession trailers. Near the big top entrance was a short wooden wagon used for the dispersing of electrical power. In North America, main power cords out of generators run to various usage points on the lot. European circuses usually spot the generator wagon away from the big top. A main power line runs to another wagon where it is broken down, fused, and outsourced by various cables to use points. This method keeps the generator noise away from the tent and flammable diesel fuel a safe distance from the public.

There were only a few modern-day wagons on the show. Most family living wagons and steel-sided wagons came from manufacturers like Stork or Mack. There was a new steel generator wagon up along the front fence. Its two state-



Five African elephants owed by Alberto, Benny and Marco Althoff, could be seen up close by visiting the show's zoo located at the back of the big top.

Al W. Stencell photograph

of-the art diesel engines hardly made any noise. Behind the concession tent was a steel-sided toilette wagon. The rest of the wagons were wooden and very old. One of the wagons that carried seat lumber had a broken frame. Some smaller wagons still had hard rubber tired wheels, and the rubber on some wheels had worn down to the metal rim. An old bandorgan sat in one of the short wooden wagons, although it never played while I was there. Wagon upgrades on Elfi's operation were limited at that time.

Anything built for the show or repaired on the road was done in house. However, unlike Circus Krone and Knie that had large shop wagons, the Austrian National Circus workshop wagon was small and short of tools. The ANC shop wagon did have a portable welding unit. A pigeon was perched on it. Pigeon hutchers set on stands were beside the wagon. There were also repairs going on up front near the big top entrance. Two workers were burning old paint off a wooden wagon and fixing the wood side lumber in preparation for a new coat of white paint. They torched and scraped while people filed into the main tent for the matinee.

Most circuses in Europe operate a paid zoo located behind the big top. They are usually open daily from mid-morning through to the start of the night show. During intermission on ANC, patrons could pay and exit through the ring entrance to the zoo. A stable tent with a wood floor sheltered the elephants. A canopy housed camels, llamas, horses and ponies. A giraffe and a rhinoceros were animals the public did not often see, and they made paying to see the zoo worthwhile. These animals belonged to Alberto, Benny, and

Marco Althoff. They were transported over the road in semi-trailers.

Although I was unable to find out the exact size of the ANC big top, my estimate was that it was about 42 - 44 meters (138-144 feet) in diameter. It held 14 rows of stringer seating with one row of chairs on the ground in front of the seating. A walkway separated this row of chairs from the box seats around the ring. The 17 sections of box seats each had three rows of three chairs. The entire lot, except the back, was enclosed in by fence. I suspect

the back of the lot also was fenced, but these sections had probably been taken down because it was the last day. I noted that the band put up and took down the exterior fence.

At the afternoon show, six band members stood by an opening in the tent sidewall. They played as the customers ducked inside. This band was from Budapest, Hungary. An eleven-piece Polish band had started the season, but left mid-summer. The tent seated about 2,000 and it was two thirds full by the time the band broke into the overture.

With the intermission, the very well received performance was close to three hours long. It reminded me of Circus Busch performances I had seen in Liepzig, East Germany in the 1980s. You got your money's worth. Alberto, Peter and Marco Althoff presented elephants, horses, camels, exotic cattle, and a boxer dog basketball number. They also brought the giraffe and the rhino into the ring. The rhino was funneled into the ring by the ring crew who held up sections of fencing.

A Russian couple, the Popovs, closed the first half. Their act was the funniest canine, cat, rooster, duck and pig act I had ever seen. The basis of their act was a house that was on fire. A dog fire brigade along with other creatures saved the day! A rooster sitting on the house chimney crowed the alarm. A duck started to ring a bell. A cat shot across the ring and out the back door curtains to get help. A dog driven ambulance arrived. A dog dashed from it into the burning house and brought out a baby. The dog put the baby in the ambulance and it took off out of the ring. The duck kept ringing the bell. The dog fire brigade arrived again in the



The big top of the Austrian National Circus was approximately 140 ft. in diameter in 1993. Seating for about 2,000 patrons included 153 box seats in three ringside rows.

Al W. Stencell photograph

form of one dog pulling a cart with two dogs in it. One held a hose that sprayed water. The other one went into the house and brought out another dog. One dog brought in a basket and took all the clothes off a clothesline beside the building and put them into the basket. A pig came into the ring pulling a large water wagon. A canine bucket brigade formed. Countless pails of water were thrown at the burning house until the fire went out.

In another amusing number, an elderly chap drove a horse and cart into the ring. On it were different birds and small animals. A woman dressed in a fur coat followed the cart into the ring. Seeing her, the cart driver clapped his hands. Dozens of fur animals leaped off her and scurried out the back door. The woman then began to change outfits in rapid fashion. This was a few years before we saw quick-change magic acts in North America.

When I wandered into the backyard that morning, I discovered a man living in the front of one of the old wagons. He was crammed in there with a number of dogs. He explained that he was from Russia. Although the living conditions were poor, he was glad to have work. Hundreds of circus artists were trying to find work after the Soviet-controlled eastern European countries stopped offering financial support to shows. Hardest hit were the circuses in the former DDR. The East German government had supported three large shows plus three smaller private circuses, as well as a number of touring fairground rides. The sheer number of unemployed show workers and artists lowered wages for established acts and workers all over Europe.

I met Daris and Gianni Huesca in the back lot. Gianni would later become known as the comic, Fumagalli. They were doing the comedy on the Austrian National Circus. Gianni proclaimed they were working for less money than normal but had no choice. He said they might be better off going back to busking in Italy where their family had been “comedia del arte” artists. One of the three numbers they did in the show was their now famous gun fighter skit. It was a fast and furious gun fight. Shots were fired, and both clowns end up on the ground. Then they reenacted the scene, but in slow motion, ending with a bullet coming out of one of their guns in slow motion via a string set-up.

During the intermission, the wild animal arena was set up for Leo and Uschi Vidlak's lion and tiger act. Several aerial acts were presented in the second half. I noted the web and cradle routines were smooth and unique. The seven attractive and well-costumed female ballet corps made numerous appearances giving the show a cabaret atmosphere. The show closed with the presentation of a Russian troupe called Jawors who did a fast and exciting Russian swing act. Earlier in the performance three members of the troupe did a very polished Russian bar act. Elfi Althoff-Jacobi's business partner, Adolf Lehner, served as compare (announcer).

During the evening intermission, elephant and pony rides were offered outside the tent. The weather had turned cold and a light rain fell. Right after the public went back into the tent the show's tent heater was turned off which was typical of the European shows I had seen. The toilette wagon and concession trailers closed. North Americans are always



The hilarious canine fire brigade act presented by the Popovs included dogs, a cat, a rooster, a duck and pigs. It was one of the highlights of the performance.

Al W. Stencell photograph

upset at having to pay to use show toilets, but that was the custom in Europe.

As the band swung into the second half music, preparations for tear down began. Earlier the fence was taken down and loaded. Jackie Althoff drove a tractor that brought the seat wagons from the back of the lot to their locations equi-

distant around the exterior of the tent so that as few foot-steps as possible were required for the men who carried the lumber. As the performance moved toward the finale, the rain became heavier. Being in a farmer's field did not bode well for a fast tear down. To get off the lot, loaded wagons needed an extra tractor pushing them as well as one out



Four heavily loaded seat wagons carried the show's seat boards, foot boards and walkway lumber, as well as the jacks, stringers, and railings. Each wagon was 27 ft. long.

Al W. Stencell photograph

front pulling. Jackie Althoff pulled wagons up to the front of the lot where they were parked in singles or hooked up pairs. Small trucks pulled them to the ramp.

The Show's Last Rail Move

I left the tear down early because I wanted to see the train load out from the start. I followed the first load to leave the lot, which was one of the tractors pulling the old heater wagon with the hard rubber tires. About a mile down the main road, it turned off onto cobblestone streets in the old part of the town. The exposed steel rims where the rubber had worn away created a machine gun like noise as steel hit stone. I arrived at the ramp where the loading of the first cut of flatcars began at 7:30 p.m. The trainmaster whistled signals to tractor drivers. Two short blasts meant go ahead. One long blast meant stop.

Train flats used by most European circuses were provided by the railroad. The ANC did not always get the same flatcars back for the next move. If you visited a rail circus in Europe and saw a wagon full of chock blocks, you knew the show was there for some duration. If the train crew threw the chocks back onto the flatcars during the unloading, you could be nearly certain the show would only be there for a few days.

On the Austrian National Circus, I saw the train crew use a device to pole the wagons along the flats. A small diameter pipe was just as long as the inner width of the flat cars with the sides up. Welded onto each end of the pipe were curved sections of pipe. These rode up against each flat car's sides. In the middle of the bar were three welded upright pieces that were about 8 inches tall. Attached to the center of the cross

pipe was a length of rope. When a wagon was pulled up onto the loading flat car, the puller tractor unhooked and went around to the back to push the wagon down the flats into position. The polers laid the bar across the flat and hooked the wagon tongue onto one of the upright pipe pieces in the center so the wagon tongue was locked in place and would not swing. To insure further safety, the polers walked some distance ahead of the wagon pulling the rope with them. When the wagon came up to the next loaded wagon, the polers unhooked the device from the wagon's tongue and brought it back to the loading area.

European flats have sides on them that fold down in a number of sections along the car. These bridge the gap between the flatcar deck and the platform. Similarly, sections at the ends of each flatcar fold down to create an almost solid bridge between the flat cars. These eliminated the need for crossover plates that North American rail shows used. Wagons were either pushed or pulled onto the flatcars by a tractor. If the tractor is in front of the wagon, it is unhooked once the wagon is up on the flat. The tractor reverses off the side of the flat onto the ramp and then comes around to push the wagon down the flats as two train polers guide the tongue of the wagon.

At the Steyr station, the railroad crew had pushed a number of flatcars beside a long loading platform next to a freight warehouse. European shows did not load flatcars from end ramps or runs as we call them. They loaded off of solid wooden or cement freight station platforms, normally used to load goods onto flats or into box cars. Show people call this area "the ramp" as there is usually an inclined road up to the platform. Some larger freight stations had a ramp up and down which helped to speed the loading and unloading process along.

When wagons were in place, the wheels were secured with steel chocks with sharpened ends. The tractor driver nudged the wagon forward, and the chocks seated themselves firmly into the wooden decking. Single wagons were often left with their tongue folded down onto the flatcar deck. When two or more wagons were spotted on a single flat, almost all of the flatcar deck

The old heating unit wagon with solid rubber wheels was shut down after the evening show intermission. This was the first wagon to leave the lot, and the author followed it to the railroad yards in order to watch the entirety of the loadout. It was the last time the Austrian National Circus moved by rail.

Al W. Stencell photograph



was needed. In such cases, two metal pins holding the tongue to the wagon's front undergear were removed. This released the tongue so that it could be stored under the wagon. Then a tractor pushing from the rear moved the wagon further forward into place. Chains on the ends of the wagons were then hooked to the side of the flat.

Once a cut of flats were loaded, the yard engine pulled these cars out and brought in another series of empty flats. Later that evening the yard engine shoved in a new string of flats towards the ramp. This followed some apparent confusion and back and forth that I did not understand. I finally got an explanation from the trainmaster of the switching that had occurred. The new cut included a very long flatcar. I had never seen such a flatcar in Europe. This was a special car so that Elfi Althoff-Jacobi's long living wagon and her salon wagon could remain hooked together on a single flatcar. Near the end of the load out an even longer flatcar appeared at the ramp. It was about 70 feet long so that it could transport the show's pole wagon. The four 50-foot tubular steel center pole towers could not be broken down into smaller sections.

The tractor driver pulling the pole wagon to the ramp area had to do some expert maneuvering. An extreme tight right turn from the street under a rail bridge was followed by an even sharper left turn. Unfortunately, the driver made the turn a little wide and the front right corner of the pole wagon went up against a storefront while the ends of the two center poles on the left side of the wagon ground themselves into the bridge underpass stones. It was a delicate situation. The show trainmaster did not want to damage the storefront glass. After a lot of cursing, the train crew managed to hook chains around both ends of the wagon, and pulling with two of the loading tractors they managed to slowly skid the pole wagon sideways off the storefront. With a slight sound of grinding stones, one of the tractor drivers inched the pole wagon clear of the railway overpass support wall. The delay was long enough to allow the last wagons from the lot to arrive. Parked in the street were the tent wagon and a small generator wagon. They quickly followed the pole wagon up the ramp and onto the last two flats. The last wagon was loaded at 2:25 a.m.

The last cut then disappeared into the darkness. I asked both the station trainmen and the show trainmaster for the location of the ramp in Linz. Nobody knew. I took off for Linz.

In the wee hours of the morning, I explored the rail lines leading to the Linz industrial areas. I found several potential ramp sites, but decided on a large yard with numerous tracks off a main line. Near the end of the street was a freight station with a double ramp. I parked near the ramp and went to sleep around 4:00 a.m. At 6:30 a.m.,

I heard noises outside. I shaved, made coffee and dressed in time to be standing beside my van when the show train slowly rounded a long curve and eased into the yard.

It took some time to switch the flats around and to bring in the first flats the way the trainmaster wanted them. The crew sorted out the wagons as they were unloaded. Some went straight to the lot. Others were parked in the rail yard or close to the street to be taken later. The pole and canvas wagons were immediately hooked up to trucks and sped off. Living wagons, the fencing wagon, heating wagons, and units such as the bandorgan and machine shop were the last to depart.

It was the last time the show would unload under Elfi's ownership. To mark the occasion, the office staff and manager, Adolf Lehner, arrived in a car. They took photos and film of themselves standing in front of the first wagon to come off the train. There were rumors that Louis Knie Jr., who had split with his cousins who owned Circus Knie, was buying the show. It would come out the next year under the ownership of a group of businessmen that Louis had partnered with.

I stayed at the ramp in Linz until only a couple of flats remained to be unloaded. I followed a truck pulling the fence wagon to the lot. In Europe, trucks towing wagons can go extremely and dangerously fast. Often, they go through red lights. Fortunately, the truck and wagon I was following stopped for several red lights allowing me to keep up with them. As we crossed a bridge, I saw the lot to my left. The lot was a riverside park across from the city center. This was where the show would appear until the end the season 16 days later.



This photo shows steel chock blocks, one of the folding end panels that served to bridge between flatcars, and a wagon's tongue that has been detached and placed on the deck of the car.

Al W. Stencell photograph

When I arrived, the four tubular steel center poles were already going up. The long distance from the ramp and going through the city center somewhat slowed the move to the lot. The show only had three or four puller trucks requiring many trips for each. Two tractors were required at the runs, and another was needed on the lot. Jackie Althoff was very good at getting a show on and off a lot. He was a good tractor driver and spotted wagons quickly in their designated places.

The front facade was taking shape. Meals were being served from the cookhouse wagon. The cook gave me a bowl of soup and a glass of vodka. Gianni Hueska (Fumagalli) came along and asked if I had tasted "sachertorte." My negative reply caused him to insist that we go to a nearby coffee house for a cake seminar. We ate a lot of sachertorte which is an Austrian chocolate cake with plum jam filling. I returned to the lot a couple hours later after sampling a half dozen cakes. I was lucky that Gianni paid.

Late in the day the rain stopped. The evening was cool but clear. The big top was up and workers were erecting the seating. Dirt was being spread in the ring. I was rounded up by Jackie Althoff. The circus priest had arrived. We were going to sit down in the reception wagon for coffee and cake. More cake! Within the hour, an ambulance arrived and backed up to Elfi Althoff-Jacobi's living wagon. She was taken to the hospital. The priest grabbed another slice of cake and followed the ambulance.

The next year, I saw both the new Austrian National Circus as well as Lehner's new show. Louis Knie's operation boasted a new attractive paint scheme, a new big top and many animals leased from an Italian circus. Louis had done a terrific job of patching up many of the old wagons. I asked him about the bandorgan and he told me it was the first thing he sold for quick cash. He also retired the hard rubber-tired wagons.



Elfi Althoff-Jacobi opened the "new" Austrian National Circus in 1974 and operated it through 1993, after which the show was sold to Louis Knie Jr. and his partners.

Al W. Stencell collection

Lehner framed a very modern looking circus titled Circus Elfi Althoff-Jacobi. He kept about six wooden wagons for offices and a bar. These were placed along the front of the show to give it a nostalgic appearance. However, the show itself moved on straight trucks and semi-trailers.

Elfi Althoff-Jacobi died in 1995 at the age of 81. **BW**



The ANC's center pole wagon required a special 70 ft. flatcar to be placed in the cut of cars provided by the Austrian railroad.

Al W. Stencell photograph



The Austrian National Circus was loaded from the railroad platform to the sides of the flatcars, and its wagons were both pushed and towed into place.

Al W. Stencell photograph

Train Loading Order

First Cut

Flat #1

- 24 front facade (22 ft.)
- 8 living wagon (16 ft.)

Flat #2

- perimeter fence wagon (25 ft.)

Flat #3

- 18 ticket windows and part of front facade (28 ft.)

Flat #4

- 82 living quarters wagon (19 ft.)
- 44 living quarters wagon (12 ft.)

Flat #5

- 65 living quarters wagon (18 ft.)
- 48 shop (16 ft.)

Flat #6

- 45 workers sleeping wagon (27 ft.)
- 46 tent heater wagon with hard rubber tires (12 ft.)

Flat #7

- 41 living wagon (15 feet.)
- 106 living wagon (18 ft.)

Flat #8

- 77 workingmen's sleeping wagon (39 ft.)

Flat #9

- toilette wagon (27 ft.)

Flat #10

- 9 living wagon (16 ft.)
- 2 living wagon (18 ft.)

Flat #11

- fencing wagon (27 ft.)

Second Cut

Three box cars for hay and other materials

Flat #12

- 22 cook house (16 ft.)
- 101 tent heater and dog act (20 ft.)

Flat #13

- 100 living wagon (17 ft.)
- 94 small animal tent (16 ft.)

Flat #14

- 6 living wagon (16 ft.)
- 40 living wagon (18 ft.)

Flat #15

- 7 living wagon (24 ft.)

Flat #16

- 20 ballet girls' roomettes (32 ft.)

Flat #17

- 98 main generator (24 ft.)

Flat #18

- 23 props and freezer for cat act meat (24 ft.)
- wagon for ring dirt and sawdust (12 ft.)

Flat #19

- 117 elephant tubs, harness, etc. (30 ft.)

Flat #20

- 26 props (24 ft.)
- 10 backdoor dressing room (12 ft.)

Flat #21

- band living wagon (33 ft.)

Flat #22

- 99 low-sided wagon
- 51 back yard generator (15 ft.)

Third Cut

Flat #23

- 19 ticket windows and front (30 ft.)

Flat #24

- 83 kitchen wagon (24 ft.)
- Volkswagen car (12 ft.)

Flat #25

- 3 office wagon (30 ft.)
- bandorgan wagon (12 ft.)



This wagon containing bales of the big top's canvas was the last to be loaded on the 44-car train in Steyr, Austria on the night of October 14/15, 1993.

Al W. Stencell photograph

Flat #26

- living wagon for tent workers (18 ft.)
- car (12 ft.)

Flat #27

- 54 L2 seats (27 ft.) arrived at the loading ramp at 11:40 p.m.

Flat #28

- 53 R2 seats (27 ft.)

Flat #29

- 52 R1 seats (27 ft.) - arrived at the loading ramp at 12:00 midnight

Flat #30

- 55 L1 seats (27 ft.)
- Volkswagen sound car (12 ft.)

Flat #31

- toilette wagon (22 ft.)
- 25 concession stock (14 ft.)

Fourth Cut

Flat #32

- tractor (12 ft.)
- house trailer (24 ft.)

Flat #33

- tractor with fork lift (18 ft.)
- 28 big top light panels (15 ft.)
- two wheel cart for water hose (6 ft.)

Flat #34

- 3 truck (21 ft.)
- tractor (15 ft.)

Flat #35 (70 ft. flat car with double trucks)

- center pole wagon

Flat #36 (60 ft. car with double trucks)

- EJA living wagon (28-30 ft.)
- 5 EJA kitchen wagon (18 ft.)

Flat #37 (long flat car)

- 105 EJA living wagon (22 ft.)
- 4 living wagon

Flat #38

- 13 lights and paint (18 ft.)
- 14 lights (12 ft.)
- 4 trailer

Flat #39

- 12 electrical dispersing wagon (19 ft.)
- 47 backyard generator (15 ft.) on the lot until center poles lowered

Flat #40

- 4 truck (16 ft.)
- tractor (15 ft.)

Flat #41

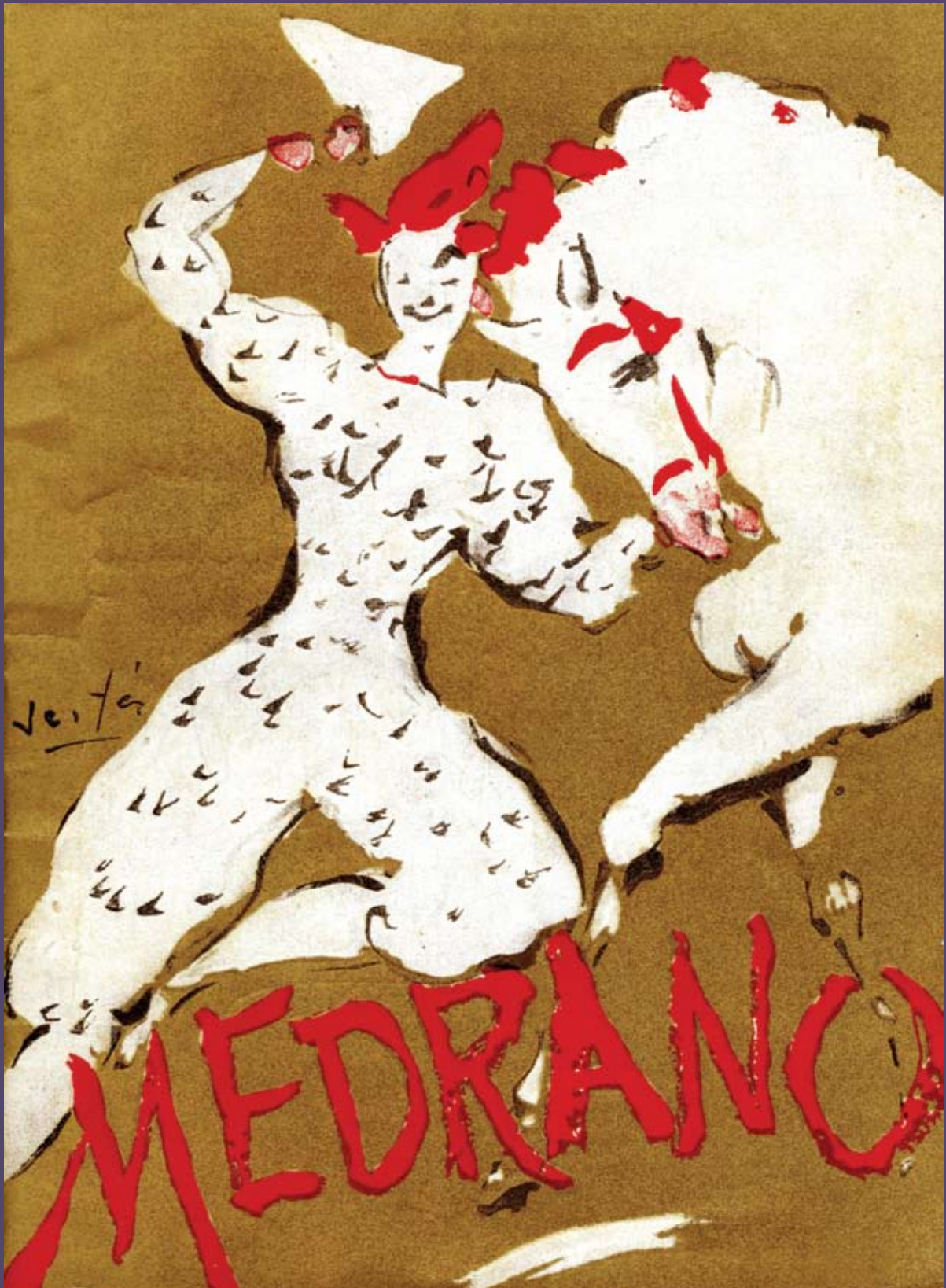
- 88 tent sections and stakes (25 ft.)

about the author...

Al W. Stencell was 14 years old when he got his first job at a fair. The owner of Green Amusements hired Al for the next summer. Full time work on circuses followed.

In 1973, Al and his wife launched Royal Bros. Circus in Canada. Al and Shirley built a new circus titled Martin and Downs in 1977, and in 1983, they also produced a new indoor circus titled Super Circus International. Al retired from the business in 1991. He has been going to Europe to see shows since his first visit in 1971 – more than 45 years pursuing this interest. Al is a past president of the Circus Historical Society and a current trustee. When describing his special interests, he said, "I like anything that tours and makes money!"





Dominique Jando Collection and Peter Shrake

Not used

Circus Historical Society

2018 Annual Convention

We're ready! Final planning has been concluded for the Circus Historical Society's July 18-21, 2018 Convention in Baraboo, Wisconsin. A detailed program agenda has been compiled and will be available for consultation on-line, on the CHS website www.circushistory.org and also via CHS social media. No less than 45 participants will appear before convention attendees, with presenters from Australia, Europe and South America, as well as across North America! Convention attendees will have a tightly packed schedule for three and a half days, with morning, afternoon and evening activities. Beyond the previously announced sessions, circus band concert, special visitation, ceremonies, parade and auction, another truly world-class activity has been added!

American Experience's film *The Circus*

The award-winning PBS series American Experience has produced a new four-hour long film documentary titled *The Circus*. It will debut on PBS stations in October, 2018. Through the cooperation of American Experience and the Al. Ringling Theatre, highlights from the film will be presented in a special premiere in Baraboo's palatial motion picture palace on Saturday night July 21 at 7:00 p.m. About an hour of selected coverage will be shown. All CHS convention registrants will receive a complimentary ticket for the presentation, for which a full house is anticipated. Following the screening will be a special on-stage panel discussion including Writer-Producer-Director Sharon Grimberg and four CHS members, who served as authorities in the film.

Host Sites – The foundation for this year's convention was provided by Joe and Carmen Colossa, and Don Horowitz, who as the owners and operators of the historic and palatial Al Ringling Mansion kindly made the attached ballroom facility available at no cost to the CHS. They are owed a debt of gratitude for their support in kicking off and facilitating the planning process. Other Baraboo-based institutions also stepped forward when contacted, each providing essential pieces of what will be a memorable and unique gathering. They include: Al. Ringling Theatre; Circus World Museum; International Clown Hall of Fame and Research Center; and Sauk County Historical Society. Representatives of all participating entities will greet members at various events and sessions. Please provide them with a demonstration of appreciation for their warm welcomes and ardent advocacy of CHS's presence.

Convention Support – Keith and Priscilla Webb have made a substantial contribution that enabled planners to take the convention experience to a new level of quality and enjoyment. They will be present for the event and be sure to make known how much you appreciate their actions on behalf of the CHS.

Registration Check-in and Packets – To simplify operations, the registration check-in desk will be at the Al Ringling Mansion ballroom, not the Clarion Hotel lobby. It will open on Wednesday, July 18, by noon, and remain open through 5:00 p.m. Registration packets will also be available on succeeding days at the ballroom. Each convention registrant will receive their convention credentials, official program, advance-purchased tickets, Baraboo map and addresses, and "Taste of Baraboo" eateries list, as well as other sundry items.

Optional Activities – CHS convention registrants have the option of six different activities to fill their Wednesday afternoon. They will receive complimentary admission to Circus World Museum throughout the convention duration by presenting their special convention credential and picture ID at the museum ticket desk. Registrants can pay for the special Al. Ringling Theatre guided tour and interpretive presentation in advance via their registration, or separate payment, by purchasing a \$15.00 ticket at the registration sign-in desk. Also available only at the desk will be tickets for the circus house tours (Al. Ringling Mansion, Charles (and later Henry) Ringling Mansion and Salome Ringling Home). There will be a sign-up sheet for specific times so docents aren't overwhelmed. Tickets cost \$20.00. The International Clown Hall of Fame can also be visited. Tickets are \$8.00 at the door. Others may elect to simply enjoy fellowship and the offerings at the sales tables in the mansion ballroom; or attend the board of trustees meeting.

Auction donations – Attendees and others desiring to donate materials to the CHS benefit auction may either bring the items with them and turn them over upon arrival at the registration desk; or may ship them in advance. Please address all packages to: 451 Roblee Road, Baraboo, WI 53913, USA. All package deliveries must be pre-paid.

Author and retail sales tables – As a convenience to convention registrants, but not as a CHS-sponsored or controlled function, sales tables will be available in the Al. Ringling Mansion ballroom. The ballroom will be open for general public sales only on Wednesday; thereafter, only registered and credentialed CHS convention attendees will be allowed in the venue. The tables are for authors and others selling circus-related materials. To obtain information on procedures, availability and rates, contact Ralph Pierce at ralphbbc@yahoo.com or call 608-434-0798 to gain information on securing a table.

To make the most of your CHS 2018 convention experience **register now! Join and bring along a friend! Volunteer to serve!**

Contact info – If you have questions, special needs or desire to provide feedback, please address all communications to circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com. At convention time, July 17-22 only, in the event of emergency or late needs, call 608-477-2742 to reach convention management.

Circus Historical Society Annual Convention
July 18-21, 2018 Baraboo Wisconsin
Registration Form

Name _____

Guest(s) _____

Street Address _____

City _____ **State/Prov.** _____ **Postal Code** _____

Country _____

Home phone _____ **Cell phone** _____ **Email** _____

Registration fees [Member or guest(s)] \$130.00 each # _____ \$ _____

Registration fees [Non-member] \$190.00 each # _____ \$ _____

Registration fees include a Circus World Museum pass good all days and a tour of the Circus World Museum library

Late Registration Fees

After June 18 and before July 8 **\$50.00 # _____ \$ _____**

On or after July 9 **\$75.00 # _____ \$ _____**

Al. Ringling Theatre tour ticket(s) \$15.00 # _____ \$ _____

Extra banquet ticket(s) \$30.00 # _____ \$ _____

TOTAL *(check or money order payable in US dollars to Circus Historical Society)* **\$ _____**

Special dietary needs? None ☐ Gluten free ☐ Kosher ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Other ☐ Specify _____

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation request submitted before June 18, full refund.

Cancellation request submitted after June 18, full refund
less \$25.00 processing fee.

Cancellation requests submitted after July 9 or no show,
NO REFUND.

Questions? Assistance?

Address all convention questions, assistance or special
requests to:

circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Mail completed registration form,
with check or money order:

Circus Historical Society
c/o Robert Cline
2707 Zoar Road
Cheraw, SC 29520-4133